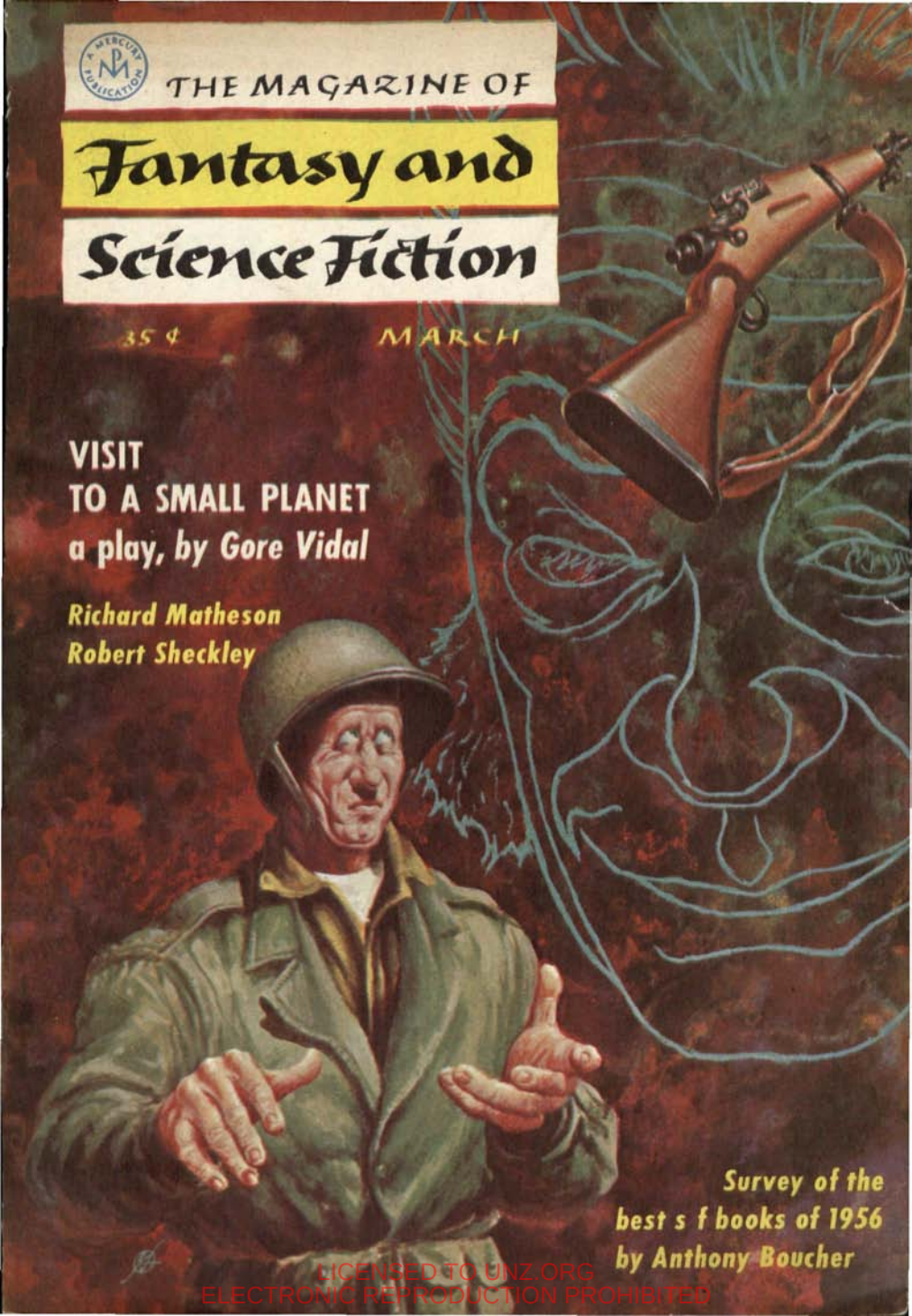

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 12, No. 3 MARCH

Survival Technique *by* POUL ANDERSON & KENNETH GRAY 3
Useful Knowledge (*verse*) *by* LEONARD WOLF 16
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"*Coming Next Month*" *appears on page 23*

COVER PAINTING BY KELLY FREAS
(*illustrating Visit to a Small Planet*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 12, No. 3, Whole No. 70, MARCH, 1957. Published monthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $4.00 in U. S. and Possessions; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices: 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under the Act of March 3, 1897. Printed in U. S. A. *© 1957 by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved.* *Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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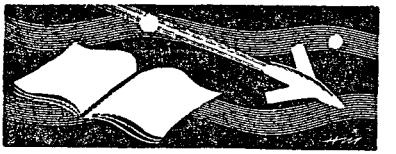
Coming Next Month



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A different historical period of this earth may be even more alien to Twentieth-Century Man than the most remote planet, as Poul Anderson has pointed out before, notably in The Man Who Came Early *(in the just-published* THE BEST FROM F&SF: SIXTH SERIES*). In this deftly entertaining new tale we see the contrast between our own era and Augustan Rome, and learn why the first prerequisite of successful time travel must be the mastery of*

Survival Technique

by POUL ANDERSON AND KENNETH GRAY

THE EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY
New York 30, N. Y.
College of Science and
Engineering
Department of Physics

May 20, 1967

Mr. James K. Maury
c/o Adventurers' Club
430 Hudson Street
New York 14, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Maury:

Your name has been given to me by Mr. Roger McIntyre, and I am therefore writing to ask whether you would be interested in joining a most unusual expedition sponsored by this department and the history section of the Arts College under a research grant from UNESCO.

You are doubtless aware from both newspaper and professional accounts that the Homolka reformulation of general relativity theory has been triumphantly confirmed by Goldberg's experiments in spatiotemporal projection, and that the device loosely known as a "time machine" is not only possible but is actually being completed in our laboratories. Pilot models have already sent human volunteers into distant regions of the earth and recent sections of the past, and brought them back unharmed. For the final test, a three-man expedition to Augustan Rome, 1 A.D., is being planned, and on the basis of Mr. McIntyre's recommendation we should very much like to include you.

Without going into the theory of the projector, I shall briefly discuss the practical aspect. Our three ex-

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plorers will be sent from the laboratory of this year to first-century Rome. They will, of course, have been previously instructed in the Latin language and customs, and will be given appropriate garb and sufficient, proper money for a three-week stay. During that time they will not reveal their identity, except in the improbable event of extreme emergency—not that the past can be "upset," but it would complicate their mission, which will be simply to mingle with the people and take notes on those small questions of detail (mores, attitudes, etc.) which are not discussed in surviving contemporary chronicles. At the end of the period, they will return to the exact spot of their materialization, and the projector field will again be generated to return them to this point of space-time.

Actually, they will return three weeks later than they left, because of the balance effect. In simple terms, the laws of conservation require that when a given mass is displaced into the past, the same mass must be brought up to the present; in fact, it must be both physically and chemically similar, within narrow limits of tolerance. In short, when we send our three men to ancient Rome, the field will automatically select three Romans of roughly equal size from the vicinity and carry them to our laboratory. By questioning these Romans during their stay with us, our historians expect to gain much other valuable information. At the end of the arbitrary three-week period, they will be returned as our men come back to the present.

Needless to say, our personnel must be carefully chosen. Though furnished with automatic pistols, and any other inconspicuous equipment that may be indicated, they should use them only as a last resort. Quite apart from humanitarian considerations, such use would vitiate the scientific purpose of the expedition, since it would make them conspicuous figures, regarded with awe and therefore cut off from the daily life which they have been sent to observe. We need men not only of courage, resource, and training, but of tact and quick wits.

Already we have coopted Mr. McIntyre, as you know a skilled anthropologist, and Dr. Simon Harbold, who is a noted Classical historian. In addition we need a man who is an athlete with experience of alien cultures. Your record as soldier and explorer makes you eminently qualified.

Accordingly, I am happy to offer it to you. If you are interested, I will supply any further details you wish, and salary can be discussed. I trust to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Very sincerely yours,
J. Worthington Barr
Chairman of the Department

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J. WORTHINGTON BARR = DEPT. OF PHYSICS EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY = NEW YORK NY = YOU BET =

MAURY =

Official transcript from tape recording
July 14, 1967

DR. BARR: At this great moment, gentlemen, at this great moment in the advance of mankind from savagery to undreamed-of heights, I think it wisest not only to film this great event as it happens, as it occurs, but to keep a running commentary. Although representatives of the press are among us, the sacred obligation of science is to have a record as given by trained observers. Underline that: *trained observers*. . . . Ah . . . Present are myself, J. Worthington Barr, Chairman of the Department of Physics; President Johnson of this great university; Dean Clausewitz of the College of Arts; Dr. Langdon, professor of Latin; and, of course, the various technicians and scientists, as well as representatives of—Ah! Mr. Maury! Here come Mr. Maury, Mr. McIntyre, and Dr. Harbold, our three intrepid emissaries to ancient Rome. Come over here, please, gentlemen. The projector is quite ready to go. Have you any statements you wish to make?

MAURY: Yes. How the devil do I keep this toga on straight?

DR. BARR: Hah-hah, you will have your little joke.

MCINTYRE: One thing worries me. I feel adept enough at Latin—I ought to, after that course they put us through!—but how, uh, I mean are we *sure* our costumes are authentic?

HARBOLD: I thought you knew, Roger. They probably aren't. We can't be sure of all these little details. That's what this expedition is for, to find out such things.

MCINTYRE: OK, OK. But if we're not supposed to admit we're time travelers—

MAURY: Just a precaution, Mac. They wouldn't believe us, that's all, and we don't want to be locked in the nut house when the time comes for us to go back.

HARBOLD: Don't worry too much about the clothes. Our accent is doubtless wrong too. But we're not going to claim to be Romans. We'll be foreigners, Germans with a smattering of education, like Arminius you know. Rome was full of outlanders.

MAURY: And if we should run into real trouble—well, I've been in trouble before now. One time in the Sinkiang Desert—

MCINTYRE: You have the guns. I'll leave the shooting to you.

MAURY: There shouldn't have to be any. Actually, with all our technical knowledge, we could support ourselves very nicely. Introduce pinball games and steam engines and whatnot. Or Harbold here

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could set up as a prophet—he'll know what's going to happen next.

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: That will not be necessary. You have ample funds.

MAURY: I know, I know. We'll just investigate the customs . . . and I understand those Roman customs were very interesting!

DR. BARR: Ahem! Naturally, the reputation of this institution—decorum—

MAURY: Don't be afraid, doc. It won't *all* get in the official report.

DR. BARR: I believe the press representatives would like to see you. You have ten minutes till, ah, zero hour.

MAURY: Sure. And don't worry about us. We've got two thousand years of progress behind us. If you must worry about something, worry about Rome! . . .

DR. BARR: There they, ah, go. Goodby, gentlemen! Good luck!

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: Stand by, here come the Romans!

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good heavens . . . there, under the lens . . . three of them! Are the guards ready?

DR. LANGDON: Yes. But I don't expect these people will get violent. Look at them huddling—the poor creatures must be half mad with fright. They're going to have to be protected from the psychic shock of transportation into a culture as far ahead of theirs as ours is.

DR. BARR: Why—why, one of them is a young woman!

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Er, not unattractive, is she? But so, um, poverty-stricken.

DR. BARR: They all are. Look at those dirty tunics—in rags! And the two men haven't shaved for a week, I'll be bound. Look at the big one—what a brute!

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: It was to be expected on the basis of probability, you know. More paupers than aristocrats in any century. And, of course, to make them less conspicuous, our men were sent into what we believe was a slum area.

DR. BARR: True. The machine, ah, selected the three nearest humans to balance . . . They're standing up! That man there, the small one, he's walking off the platform toward us!

DR. LANGDON: I'd better go reassure them.

DR. BARR: A great moment. Where's that microphone? A great moment in the onward march of science.

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: I wonder how our men are making out . . . or did make out . . . really, time travel ought to have a separate verb form.

DR. BARR: No reason to worry about them, Dean Clausewitz. Not only are they men of courage and resource, but they, ah, know the score . . . know what to expect . . . a great advantage. Believe me, I anticipated all the contingencies. I am not lacking in imagination.

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: What's the matter with old Langdon? He's jab-

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bering at them and they're jabbering back and nobody seems to understand.

DR. BARR: Could these be, ah, non-Romans too? Visiting foreigners that were by unlucky chance selected—

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: Surely not. They look right, you know, just about like modern Italians. . . . Hmmm, they appear to be recovering their self-possession. Look, the young woman's smiling. I'll bet if you washed her face and gave her some makeup she'd be quite stunning.

DR. LANGDON: Gentlemen!

DR. BARR: What is it? What's the matter?

DR. LANGDON: They don't understand me, and I don't understand them. Just a word here and there is all.

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: What on earth?

DR. LANGDON: Oh, it's simple enough. Classical Latin apparently was not pronounced as we have assumed. Our scholars only guessed at it, after all—and to make matters worse, these are slum dwellers. They're talking some equivalent of Cockney.

DEAN CLAUSEWITZ: Good Lord! But this ruins the whole experiment! In three weeks we can't find out—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And what about our poor time travelers?

DR. BARR: Oh, they will get by, I am sure. But we here seem to be in a quandary.

MORELLI: Excuse me. I think [illegible] lingo.

DR. BARR: Oh, Mr. Morelli. This is Mr. Morelli of our physics department. Don't tell me *you* understand them?

MR. MORELLI: After a fashion. You see, I speak Italian, and know a little Church Latin to boot. I kind of get the "feel" of it. They want to know what's happened to them.

DR. LANGDON: Excellent! Between us, we ought to—yes, of course, I might have guessed. Italian derives from a Latin corrupted by ignorant folk in the Dark Ages. The Classical pronunciation among the lower classes must have been basically similar. Come on, Morelli, let's see what we can do.

DR. BARR: Good. Remove the, ah, subjects to the prepared quarters as soon as possible. Oh, just a moment, here is the photographer from *Life*. Would you like me to pose with the Romans?—This is a great day for science, a great day!

Memorandum dated July 21, 1967
FROM: *Dr. Charles Langdon, Dept. of Classical Languages*
TO: *Dr. K. V. Clausewitz, Dean of the College of Arts*
SUBJECT: *Daily report on spatio-temporal research experiment*

We are making rapid progress now that I have the "hang" of their twisted argot. All three are cooperative and express themselves well pleased with the treatment they have received, with an exception noted below.

The man Publius describes him-

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self as an unemployed sailor. He has a large stock of anecdotes about his past adventures; frankly, I doubt his strict veracity, but true or not, his stories furnish a priceless compendium of the details of everyday life. At last the riddle of the trireme has been solved! His words are, of course, being recorded, and a transcript is being prepared. I suggest, however, that access to this transcript be given only to a few properly authorized scholars, since his language and reminiscences may be described as racy. In fact, I do not believe even the original could go through the mails, let alone a translation.

So far Julius has remained evasive about his own life. I gather that he lived by his wits. In brief though colloquial terms, he was a confidence man or racketeer.

The young woman Quintilia has proven extremely cooperative, indeed to a somewhat embarrassing extent. As a *fille de joie*, she seems to feel called upon to pay for her lodging in the only coin she has. To safeguard the good name of this institution, though without making any insinuations of misconduct to date, I suggest that young Dr. Martens be transferred from this project.

The burden of discussion today dealt with their complaints. Their awe of us has worn off with surprising rapidity. Whether they really understand the idea of spatio-temporal transference is debatable, but at least an accomplished fact no longer impresses them. They unanimously demand to be let out of their quarters and offered entertainment. I have given them magazines, but the illustrations only seem to whet their appetites. I suggest that, if possible, some films be shown them, simple slapstick comedy within the grasp of their minds. Furthermore, in view of Quintilia's profession, I think it would be wisest to lock them into their separate rooms at night.

Tomorrow it is planned that we will take anthropometric measurements.

THE EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY
New York 30, N. Y.
Office of the President

July 22, 1967

Dr. J. Worthington Barr
Department of Physics

Sir:

Since you are in charge of the time project, I must hold you answerable for the catastrophe which has occurred. Kindly let me have the precise circumstances, the names of all concerned, and the steps contemplated to deal with the situation.

Yours truly,

James M. Johnson
President

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THE EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY
New York 30, N. Y.
College of Science and Engineering
Department of Physics

July 23, 1967

Dr. James M. Johnson
Office of the President

Dear Sir:

This letter will confirm our conversation of yesterday and serve as my official explanation of the difficulty. I must, however, decline to bear personal responsibility for the incident, nor is my department actually to blame. May I point out that the project was undertaken jointly with the History Dept.?

Briefly, then, as closely as the facts can be ascertained, yesterday at 1:30 P.M. the Roman subjects were called into the common room of their assigned quarters for the scheduled anthropometric studies. Present were Dr. Langdon as interpreter and Drs. Cabot and Simmons of the Department of Anthropology. It was noted that the woman Quintilia had put on modern dress, kindly lent to her by Dr. Langdon's wife. She had requested such garments three days previously after seeing some pictures in *Mademoiselle*.

I can only conclude, and my colleagues join with me in this, that the Romans had prepared their scheme in advance and waited until the original precautions of the campus police were relaxed. The report of what happened suffers from a deplorable paucity of precise detail, but the observers agree that Publius volunteered to be measured first. He and Julius removed their clothes. Dr. Langdon requested Quintilia to leave the room meanwhile, but she refused quite profanely. It must be remembered that the Classical world had a different attitude toward nudity from that of our Western Christian Civilization.

Publius sat down in a chair and Drs. Cabot and Simmons bent over him with calipers and notebook. Being a large and powerful man, Publius reached up and, I gather, knocked their heads together. Meanwhile Julius used some variety of judo on Dr. Langdon. Before any of our unhappy colleagues had fully recovered consciousness, they were stripped, bound, and gagged with Dr. Langdon's garments. Publius and Julius donned the clothes of, respectively, Drs. Cabot and Simmons, and all three subjects thereon left the room.

There are no witnesses to their further actions. They must simply have mingled with the crowd, as this was a period between summer classes, and walked off the campus. Their motives are uncertain, but Dr. Oliver of the Department of Psychology is making an intensive study and has advanced the preliminary hypothesis, subject to correction, that it was a matter of boredom, curiosity and greed.

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After all, three slum dwellers might not relish the prospect of being returned to their unfavorable environment. However, on the basis of Gestalt theory, Dr. Hayward disputes this suggestion. Both will submit reports as soon as practicable.

The occurrence is unfortunate, but there is no ground for alarm. I should particularly wish to reassure you in your concern for Maury, McIntyre and Harbold. True, we cannot recover them from the past without projecting three other humans back; but if necessary, the corpses of our three subjects will suffice.

However, such a tragic denouement is hardly probable. I have been in conference with Inspector Brannigan of the Metropolitan Police Force, and he assures me that strangers from another era, totally ignorant of our language and customs, cannot long remain undetected. Indeed, it seems most likely that the fear of such unfamiliar objects as skyscrapers and automobiles will force them to return to us voluntarily. Meanwhile a police dragnet is out, but chiefly for the protection of the Romans themselves, who in their helplessness could possibly meet with some accident.

I await the return, voluntary or enforced, of our subjects at any moment. It is clear from the above, as your own well-known sense of fairness will readily admit, that neither I nor my department can be held in any way responsible; but naturally we offer our fullest cooperation.

Very truly yours,
J. Worthington Barr
Chairman of the Department

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
Department of Justice
Washington, D. C.

July 30, 1967

Dr. James M. Johnson
Office of the President
Empire State University
New York 30, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of your telegram of the 30th inst. regarding the disappearance of three Romans of the Augustan Era and the failure of the local police to apprehend them.

Since these people are not American citizens and have not been granted visas, their case would normally fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Immigration and Naturalization. But since special permission was obtained for your experiment, this bureau is prepared to enter the case. We should, in fact, have been notified immediately, and your delay in doing so will itself have to be investigated.

In the meantime, our New York office will take over the search.

Yours truly,
K. Edward Windhover

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Memorandum dated
December 18, 1967

FROM: *Dr. Alfred Morelli, Dept. of Physics*

TO: *Dr. J. Worthington Barr, Chairman*

SUBJECT: *Development of sweep-field attachment for spatio-temporal projector*

This is to let you know that the pilot model of the sweep-field attachment has been tested and proven so satisfactory that a full-scale device can now be constructed. I estimate that we can have it ready in about six weeks, provided we can get the funds. Setting it for the physical characteristics of Maury, McIntyre and Harbold, we can then scan the entire central Mediterranean area of 1 A.D. (or, by then, 2 A.D.) and pick them up wherever they are—or their bodies if they have died.

I'm not so worried about this, though. With their modern background and equipment—well, they can't change the past, but maybe it'll turn out that Augustus Caesar had three powerful ministers who really ran the Empire and didn't get into the history books!

The main stumbling block, aside from the cost, will be getting three humans to exchange for our boys. Since those blasted Romans haven't turned up yet . . . poor devils, they're probably in the East River by now. I'd guess they got scared, tried to come back to us, and never made it for some reason. Well, if we don't find them, we'll just have to go ahead and use three unclaimed bodies from the morgue. Can you arrange that with the cops? I'm attaching an IBM tabulation of the required physical measurements.

JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
April 7, 1968

Studies of Physical and Psychic Lesions Incident to the Hazards of Time Travel

by C. Galen, M.D., Ph.D., School of Medicine, Empire State University
and E. S. Oliver, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Empire State University

By now the misadventures of the University expedition to Augustan Rome are common knowledge, but it was felt that a scientific study of James K. Maury, Roger McIntyre and Simon Harbold would prove of interest and possibly of value to physicians who may in the future have to treat patients with a similar experience. The following data are published with the permission of the men in question and of the University authorities.

Briefly to recapitulate, they materialized in a slum area at midnight, as planned. The streets of that time being unlighted, and few

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people abroad, they were not noticed. Elated by their success, they studied the location carefully so they could return to it at the appointed time, and then set out to find lodging for the remainder of the night.

Their account is rather confused. Presumably, as they went past a dark alley, they were set on by robbers, who were common in that part of town. About four men attacked them, and Harbold suffered a knife wound in the upper left biceps. Maury drew his revolver and disposed of one bandit. The noise attracted the attention of an official patrol, which arrived on the scene and began to club all present into submission. Naturally, Maury did not fire on them, but all he gained by his forbearance was a mild concussion. Being terrorized, McIntyre fled and managed to elude pursuit.

Confined in separate cells, though with numerous fellow prisoners, Maury and Harbold spent a miserable time, much annoyed by vermin. It was two days before the former was brought before a magistrate. In the meantime Harbold apparently contracted a variety of plague from louse bites; furthermore, his wound was badly infected. His immunizations appear to have been ineffective, which suggests that there has been a radical mutational change in a number of viruses during the past two millennia and further suggests the necessity of extensive bacteriological studies before any such expeditions are again undertaken.

Maury had been stripped of all his gear by the police, and was not allowed to have it back to prove his claims of great powers. He was, in fact, considered to be suffering from delusions—insofar as anyone understood his version of Latin—and was in all events an unregistered alien, presumed to be of some Germanic tribe. Though this was before the battle of Teutoburger Wald, there was considerable tension and Germans were suspect. The upshot was that Maury was enslaved and sold to the master of a galley in the Egyptian trade. He spent the rest of his seven-month stay in the past pulling an oar under most unsanitary conditions.

However, the case had aroused the interest of the quaestor, who had Harbold brought to him. Though semi-delirious from fever, Harbold asked for his medical kit, and after the usual linguistic difficulty this was given to him. Under improved conditions of detention, and with the help of penicillin injections, he recovered very slowly. Much impressed, the quaestor finally asked him to demonstrate the other twentieth-century equipment captured from the expedition, and this he did. Naturally, he expected to be treated as an important figure, and the psychic shock must have been considerable when he was accused of witchcraft and

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all the apparatus was destroyed. It seems that magic was illegal under Roman law; and being a people utterly devoid of scientific curiosity and positively hostile to technological innovation—which could upset their slave-labor economy—they had no further interest in him. Harbold was condemned to be thrown to the lions as soon as he got well enough to provide good sport. The temporal sweepfield was developed just in time to save him.

Meanwhile McIntyre, fleeing, survived the night but the next day had his money stolen by some cutpurse. He tried to sell his gear, but no one was interested enough to give him more than scrap metal prices, and he learned later that he had been cheated even on that transaction. In a few days, McIntyre found himself a penniless foreigner, unable to get work since he lacked the manual skills of the era and certainly unable to convince anyone of the facts. Wisely, he did not even attempt to do this, but eked out a precarious existence as a beggar. He was near starvation when rescued.

The full account may, of course, be found elsewhere. Turning to the medical and psychiatric examinations . . .

FEDERAL BUREAU OF
INVESTIGATION
Department of Justice
Washington, D. C.

May 21, 1968

Dr. James M. Johnson
Office of the President
Empire State University
New York 30, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of your communication of the 15th inst. regarding the case of the three missing Romans. Rest assured, this bureau will not give up the case. This bureau never gives up a case. You will be notified when the subjects have been found and arrested.

Yours truly,
K. Edward Windhover

Headquarters of the National
Committee of
THE ALL-AMERICAN PARTY
Roosenhower Building
Chicago 19, Illinois

August 9, 1993

Mr. Julio Arminelli
Anglosaxon Arms Hotel
New York 8, N. Y.

Dear Julius,

This is going to be kind of a hard note to write, considering how long we have been friends and all, and believe me I still think of you as my old pal and as soon as I can I will see you again and I won't forget your wife and kids neither. But for the time being we had better stop seeing each other. People are starting to talk, and I can't afford that. You know how it is.

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Me Hercule, it seems like a long time ago we came to the good old USA! And it is, you know, 26 years about. By now we would probably have been down in Pluto's boarding house from some or other filthy disease if that time machine had not yanked us up to now. These doctors they got nowadays are Georgios verus, huh, old pal?

Remember how scared we was at first? Even after we had busted out, we was scared, all the cars and stuff. I remember Quintilia was about ready to break and run for it, till I told her these things did not hurt other people so why should they hurt us? Only it was you figured out the traffic light system, you always was a sharp boy, Julius. Otherwise we would likely have been arrested then and there. I guess it was us all together who found a low class part of town. We have got a nose for that.

Plain luck, I admit, that there was this big Italian section where we could make ourselves understood and get us a flophouse where they do not ask questions. Not that we have ever been in much danger, even since we got famous. The only people who got a close look at us before we busted out was these science boys at the U., and they are schnooks who could not identify their own grandmother in a lineup.

Remember how Quintilia got to work? Some doll, and her job don't change none in two thousand years! I am glad, though, you made me stop after I mugged that one guy in Central Park. It was a two-hundred buck haul, but you are right, crime don't pay.

And then that fortune-telling racket you started. Did that ever pull them in! After we had bailed you out the first time and got wise to the law and called it an Orphic religion, we had them, boy, we had them. These religions nowadays don't know a damn thing about showmanship. But don't forget, I was the one who cleaned out that big crap game and got us our capital. I am still good at it. When you learned to throw them scientific on the deck of a lousy little galley in a mistral wind, you never forget how, even if the shape is different nowadays.

I don't think you was right in your last letter, where you said it was luck Quintilia roped that Park Avenue swell and got him to set her up in a swank apartment and all. That doll knows her stuff, I tell you. If we had stayed in Rome, she might have ended up with Caesar. Better this way, though. Wives don't poison mistresses any more. Not very often. Of course, it was nice having connections through her boy friend so we could get forged papers. This century is almost as bad as Rome where it comes to wanting official papers in triplicate. Imagine me, old Popeye Publius the sailor, with a birth certificate in Boston!

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How do you like my English, by the way? I am trying it on you this time. I never did learn to write English so well, though you know I got a Brooklyn accent nobody could tell was put on. I remember the Italians where we hid out at first was surprised how fast we all learned the lingo. But hell, when they spoke a hundred languages in the Roman Empire, you had to be good at them or go under, isn't that so? You write just like a college professor, take it from me.

In fact, our busting loose was only the second-best thing that ever happened to us. The best was being born in the Roman slums, or the Ostia waterfront in my case. Sounds funny? Well, just think of it as the good old School of Hard Knocks. We learned how to handle people back then, because if we did not know how we would end up heaving an oar or feeding the lions, which we did not want to do, and people do not change much. Not big-city working stiffs, anyway.

But I am writing too much about the old days. It is just to show that I still think a lot of you and I am not forgetting you even if we can't meet again for a while. You see, I am on the National Committee now and I can damn near handpick the next candidates for governor of you-know-what three states—and elect them, by Jupiter's right eye! Only till our boys are in the saddle, with me behind them pulling all the strings, it just would not do for Big John Brutto, the People's Pal, to be so close to Julio Arminelli who everybody knows owns all the rackets in New York even if they can't pin it on him. Once the elections is over, I will look you up for sure, because there is plenty you can do for us and I do not think you will mind getting on the gravy train.

Well, so now I got to close. I had a letter from Quintilia the other day. She has built a new house in Beverly Hills and having ditched Husband Number Six, or is it Seven, she is going to make another movie. Maybe she is over forty years of age now, but mammis Veneris, that gal can still pull them in!

Your Old Friend,
Publius (Big John)

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Useful Knowledge

I

A lady ghost, alas, forswears
Seductive poses;
And on her bosom, ah, she wears
Ectoplasmic roses.

Poor soul, no matter where she goes
Her costume is funereal,
And every handsome lad she knows
She's met at someone's burial.

II

The ghost of the young business man
Is racked by one emotion:
In spite of THINK, or pep, or plan,
He's had his last promotion.

On his tombstone, sad, he groans
And cannot cut his losses;
It isn't death that he bemoans,
But his before his boss's.

III

The tall professor's handsome ghost
Finds his condition splendid.
He's really luckier than most
Whose lifespan has been ended.

His ghostly classes, all night long
Listen with sobriety.
He isn't frightened to be wrong
And signs no oaths of loyalty.

IV

The science fiction writer's shade
Finds death not lacking merit.
On every hand, the shapes he's made
For cash, appear in spirit.

Venusians, he's pleased to find
Are shaped like his prediction;
Their ghostly tentacles unwind
Exactly as in fiction.

LEONARD WOLF

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If you enjoy a gentle, quietly humorous story that carries, scorpion-like, a sting in its tail—if, like me, you're especially pleased when such a story seems even better upon rereading, with foreknowledge of the sting—then I think you'll be delighted by this account of Mr. Cavendish's occult revenge upon his pestilential covey of ravening relatives.

The Proper Spirit

by ROBERT BLOCH

MR. RONALD CAVENDISH WHEELED the laden tea-cart into the dining room. Depositing the entree and side-dishes on the table, he turned and surveyed himself in the side-board mirror.

What he saw did not displease him. He was, he reflected—and so did the mirror—a gentleman of the old school. A cynic would have dismissed him as type-casting for a stage butler, but Mr. Cavendish took little heed of cynics.

The fashionable address of his old brownstone house, the solidity of the mahogany and sterling effects among its contents, the tangibility of his banked assets were all sufficient answers to cynics. Yes, and that included relatives.

Mr. Cavendish made a face at the mirror. It was not a nice face, and he wished his relatives could see it. Well, they'd be seeing it soon enough, over the dinner-table.

Here it was, six o'clock, and everything was arranged. Everything was ready for them.

Ready. Mr. Cavendish crossed hastily to the parlor. He'd almost forgotten something. The big Sarouk had been rolled back, and now he knelt on the bare floor and rubbed out the blue chalk-marks with his handkerchief. It would never do to let them see the pentagram. And while he was at it, he might just as well light some incense and get that faint odor out of the room. Someone could just possibly recognize it.

"There." Mr. Cavendish stood up, flexing his knee joints. After all, he was pushing sixty—or was sixty pushing him, eh? Might be a good idea to check on the affair of that fellow, what's-his-name, Doctor Faust. Perhaps there was a similar deal available to him without, of course, the element of risk.

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Maybe tonight, after the family dinner, he could hold a little session and inquire of—

Ping!

Mr. Cavendish shot his cuffs and marched to answer the doorbell. He had just time to assume his "dear old Uncle Ronald" expression, and then they burst past him into the parlor.

Fat, simpering Clara, wizened little Edwin, sideburned Harry, and hennaed Dell. Last one in is a dirty dog—that would be Jasper, of course. He wheezed and he waddled and he joined the inane Medley of "Hello, Uncle Ronald," and "My, you're looking fit," and "Just like old times, the family all together under one roof again."

Seats. Cigarettes. Tiny glasses of brandy. Ronald Cavendish saw to all the amenities, and even managed a smile when Edward lifted his glass and murmured, "To your good health."

Then, "Shall we go in to dinner?" he proposed. "I have everything waiting."

At the mention of dinner, Jasper was already on his feet. A greedy type. But then they were all greedy, Mr. Cavendish reflected, wistfully.

Take Clara. "My, what a lovely silver service." That was Clara. Her gimlet eyes peering from folds of fat needed only a jeweler's loupe to complete the picture as she took inventory down to the last penny.

Edwin, her husband, sniffed the brandy. "Napoleon or Armagnac, Uncle Ronald?" he asked. As if Mr. Cavendish would serve Napoleon to them, and before dinner, too! Edwin didn't know, but he lusted to learn. It wasn't money he wanted, but luxury.

Then there was Harry. "Squab under glass, by golly! You must have been playing the winners, eh, Unc?" Thus Harry, at sight of the breast of guinea hen. Harry with his racing form and his—ugh! —"Unc." Harry was greedy for luck.

And Dell. Mr. Cavendish contemplated her kohled, cold eyes and the figure alternately swelled and svelte. He knew what *she* was greedy for. Right now she probably found it easily available during those afternoons when Harry was out at the track; in ten years she'd need money for gigolos, or whatever they called them nowadays.

Nowadays. That's what Jasper was talking about. Mr. Cavendish forced himself to pay attention.

"Nowadays you seldom sit down to a meal like this." *Chomp-chomp.* "Don't know how you do it, Ronald, with Grace gone these seven years." *Chomp-chomp.* "Rattling around in a big old barn like this, without servants or anyone to look after you. Wish you'd"—*chomp-chomp*—"move down to the Club with me."

Yes, that was Jasper. Move down to the Club and let him take over. Lock, stock and barrel. He'd han-

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dle the sale of the house and the investments like a big, benevolent brother-in-law. Mr. Cavendish, who always prided himself on giving the devil his due, had to admire Jasper's utter impartiality—*he* was greedy about *everything*.

So thinking, he addressed himself to a glass of warm milk and partook of French toast from a small casserole set beside his plate.

"Whassamatter, Unc, this chow too rich for you?" This from Harry, along with a gratuitous dirty look from wife Dell which he ignored.

"Touch of ulcers," Mr. Cavendish said. "Doctor's orders."

"Doctor?" Clara brightened. "Have you been seeing Doctor Barton again? What did he say? Nothing serious, I hope. You know, lots of times they say it's ulcers, but it turns out to be stomach can—"

"Errumph!" Edwin knew how to turn her off, and he thought he was doing it just in time. "I'm sure Uncle Ronald takes good care of himself, dear. Seven years a widower, and you'd never know it from this table."

"Thank you," said Mr. Cavendish. "Might I help you to another guinea hen? There's plenty here for all."

"I'm ready," Jasper said. "And some of that sauce. Never tasted better. For an old bachelor, you do yourself proud. Of course, the chef at the Club—"

"How come you never remarried?" Dell asked. "The women would be after a man like you in droves. I mean, you're still sort of well-preserved like, and with all that moola—"

It was Harry's turn to issue an unlaundered glance. But Mr. Cavendish was not offended.

"You know the reason," he said. "I still have Grace with me whenever I want her."

Well, here it was. Mr. Cavendish braced himself for the onslaught.

Jasper was the first to waddle over the barricade, armored in false geniality. "Really, Ronald," he said. "We're a bit disturbed, all of us. This morbid fancy of yours—that Grace is always with you—it's not sound."

"Neither are your assumptions," Mr. Cavendish answered, helping Jasper to his third portion, with more of the savory sauce. "My belief is neither morbid nor a fancy. Ever since the dawn of history, enlightened men have known it's possible for the departed to return when properly summoned. If you'd investigate the annals of psychic research, you'd understand that communication with the spirits is quite commonplace."

Clara offered a fat-lipped pout. "You see?" she addressed the others. "It's just like I said, not Uncle Ronald's fault at all. He's merely repeating what that crazy medium told him—the one he went to after Grace died. She's the one who

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filled him with all this nonsense."

Edwin was *errumphing* violently.

Mr. Cavendish smiled and served coffee. "It's true I went to a medium after Grace's passing. You all know that, and I shall not distress you by alluding to the hullabaloo you stirred up when you heard of it. But you needn't have worried. After a few visits I made a most gratifying discovery. I learned that a medium was unnecessary—I myself, am a psychic sensitive. Since then I have conducted my own investigations. I dare say I've managed to go further than most practicing mediums today."

"Ghosts!" Dell shuddered. "I hate to talk about 'em. Not that I believe in that stuff, understand."

"If you did, you'd not be subject to either fear or hatred," Mr. Cavendish assured her. "Actually, except for certain limitations, they're just like one of us. Take Grace, for example. The last time I saw her she seemed as real as you are."

"Be reasonable, Ronald," said Jasper. "You don't mean to tell us you spend all your time talking to the imaginary spirit of your dead wife?"

Ronald Cavendish finished the last of his French toast, took a sip of milk, and then lit the candles on the table.

Tapers put forth blossoms to flower against the shadows.

"I've told you no such thing," he declared. "True, at first I spent a good deal of time with Grace here. But—I blush to admit it—I tired of that. Of *her,* rather. Why, I asked myself, should I confine my companionship to Grace when there are so many other fascinating personalities available? After all, our marriage ended with her passing; where she is now, there's neither marriage nor giving in marriage. So for your information, I haven't summoned Grace for over four years."

"You mean you've given up all this malarkey?" Harry asked.

"Quite the contrary. It's just that there's such an infinite number of other contacts available to me." Mr. Cavendish smiled in the shadows. "I wish I could make you understand. Why, it's like having the combined libraries of all the world right here at your fingertips. It's like owning the greatest museum, the largest record collection. You've seen my pianoforte in the parlor, for example. Oftentimes during dinner I regale myself with the music of Handel, and Haydn—played by the composers themselves."

"Nuttier'n a fruitcake!" Dell murmured, but Mr. Cavendish affected not to hear her.

"Think of being able to summon the greatest shades in history," he continued. "To be able to converse with Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, while listening to Chopin at the piano."

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"You mean them dead long-hairs come here and knock out tunes?" Harry was fascinated in spite of himself. "Say, about those spirits, now. Is it true they can see the future? I mean, like say if there's gonna be a horse in the sixth at Belmont tomorra, you think maybe somebody like Michael Angelo or whatever could give you a tip?"

Mr. Cavendish smiled. "Perhaps," he said. "Although I've never cared for racing."

"Enough of this!" Even in the shadows, Jasper's face loomed in mottled purple. "I'm getting dizzy myself, and no wonder. Ronald, you're talking like a madman. And in such a case, we have no choice but to treat you as one."

"Calling up the ghost of Napoleon!" Clara scoffed. "I'll say he's crazy, all right. Grace's ghost isn't good enough for him any more, he says. Suppose he wants us to believe he spends his evenings with Cleopatra."

"A very much overrated female, I assure you," said Mr. Cavendish, softly. "Of course, I may be doing the lady an injustice, owing to the language barrier. Although my opinion is not based upon our lingual activities alone."

"You been playing around with the famous babes of history?" Dell grew suddenly animated. "That sounds kinda interesting, you know? I mean, I always wondered about some of them. Take this here Madame Pompadour, and Anne Boleyn."

Mr. Cavendish shuddered slightly. "I'd rather not talk about *her*," he said. "When I summoned that particular young woman, I'd forgotten she had been decapitated. She appeared with her head tucked underneath her arm."

Jasper punctuated his remarks with a resounding belch, then turned to Ronald Cavendish with the humoring smile generally reserved for those in their first or second childhood.

"Ronald, you've got to listen to us now. After all, we're your *family*. We've tried to be patient. Very patient." And he registered his interpretation of patience; his head cocked for all the world like a fat vulture perched on a limb above its victim.

"We've tolerated your eccentricities," Jasper continued. "But outsiders won't take so charitable a view. What will other people say when they hear such things?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Cavendish. "Unless you tell them."

"I'm afraid the time has come when someone has to be told," Jasper answered. "After all, you're —*burp!*—responsible for a sizable fortune. If the banks and your brokers ever got wind of your ideas, they'd go wild."

Jasper had never been a brilliant speaker, Mr. Cavendish reflected, but this time he was apparently surpassing his most boring previ-

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ous efforts. It appeared as though he had already put Edwin and Clara to dozing, and Harry slouched in his chair in a listless fashion. But for some reason, Mr. Cavendish himself was fascinated by what he heard.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded, suddenly.

"Well, it's not me, understand—it's all of us. We got together beforehand and talked things over. We agreed the best solution would be for you to step out of the active investment end. You aren't getting any younger, and perhaps the strain contributes to your—*burp!*—eccentricities. Time for you to sit back and take things easy. What I suggest is that you turn over your power-of-attorney to someone. Me, for instance. I can handle the estate for you without any trouble. You just sit back and enjoy yourself. This is serious, Ronald. I'm making you a fair offer. Surrender your power-of-attorney and go on living as you like. Call up all the spooks you want; we won't mind."

Jasper belched again, portentously. "If not, we'd have no choice. We'd be forced to call in an alienist. You know what that means. Why, on the basis of what we've heard here tonight alone, you'd be certified in jig time. Right, folks?"

He glanced down the table and noted that a slumber party was in progress. "Too hot in here," he complained. "Can't you open a window or something?"

"Presently," Mr. Cavendish said.

Jasper fumbled at his vest. "Sauce too rich for my blood," he murmured. "Got to watch that—doctor told me . . ." He slumped forward in a doze. Before drifting off he managed a weak wheeze. "What's the answer?"

Mr. Cavendish stood up. He leaned forward and spoke quite loudly, as if to waken his guests and make sure they heard every word.

"My answer," he said, "is no. No power-of-attorney, no alienist, no asylum. Do you hear that, my dear family? This is a farewell dinner. For tonight, having liquidated all my assets, I am flying to Tibet, to pursue my studies in the occult sciences.

"Yes," he continued, "this is a farewell. A long farewell. But I perceive you have already departed."

Indeed, they had. Slumped and seated in the shadows, there was no longer a semblance of sleep. Sightlessly staring at the skeletal remnants of the guinea hens, the family was quite dead.

Mr. Cavendish surveyed them, shuddered slightly, and prayed that no medium would ever be unfortunate enough to evoke them.

Then he moved around the table, glanced at his watch, and noted that he had less than an hour to reach the airport. He opened the sideboard door and extracted a bulging valise.

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There. He was ready now. He stepped back to the table and bent over the tapers. "Out, brief candles," he said.

Mr. Cavendish was in the dark, but he was not afraid. Some of his best friends were in the dark. He'd met some very nice people under those circumstances. Madame Pompadour, Dell had said. Ha! He could have told her about Guinevere, and Montespan, and Helen of Troy. There was life in the old dog yet, and he had quite a way with the ladies.

Ladies. That reminded him of something. He couldn't leave without showing the proper spirit.

Mr. Cavendish chuckled. "Proper spirit" indeed! Why, he owed the entire success of tonight's party to the proper spirit.

It was time to express his gratitude for the guinea hen, with its most unusual savory sauce. Perhaps the kitchen was still occupied —at any rate, he'd make the gesture. Pure genius, his summoning a culinary expert for the family's last meal.

Mr. Cavendish tiptoed quietly to the kitchen door, opened it just a trifle, and whispered into the darkness.

"Thank you, Lucrezia," said Mr. Cavendish.

COMING NEXT MONTH . . .

Stories by

MURRAY LEINSTER
LESTER DEL REY
POUL ANDERSON
MILDRED CLINGERMAN
CHAD OLIVER
ISAAC ASIMOV

and Others

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Last September Charles L. Fontenay received an agreeable amount of national publicity. Winning a blue ribbon for painting at the Tennessee State Fair is not usually a topic for wire-service dispatches, but Mr. Fontenay did it the hard way: he won his ribbon with the colorful canvas on which he had been casually wiping his palette-knife! Although this episode will confirm the blackest views of some critics of modern painting, there's nothing inherently unlikely in the creation of visual beauty by sheer accident—as anyone knows who has ever played with a kaleidoscope. Nevertheless, I am glad that Fontenay does not rely upon the caprice of chance in his writing, but carefully plans a logical and convincing sequence—as in this novelet of the disastrous marooning of the First Martian Expedition, and the strange means by which it was rescued.

Up

by CHARLES L. FONTENAY

FOR MANY HOURS THE INVISIBLE JET hissed steadily through the hole that should not have been there. While the pressure behind it kept it going, a tiny fraction of the atmosphere of Mars was unusually rich in oxygen.

At last, still unnoticed, the hissing faded and stopped. The tank was empty.

How the break occurred in a seamless tank was to be the subject of a fruitless investigation months later. The most attractive guess was that the sandstorm had something to do with it.

How the break went unnoticed was explained easily. Carder and Li were on an exploratory hike. Following orders that one man always stay within a quarter mile of the landing boat *Phobos,* Weiss was a hundred yards away when the sandstorm hit. Nobody goes anywhere in a Martian sandstorm, not even a hundred yards.

When the cloud of red sand had passed over and rolled away toward Syrtis Major, Lt. John Weiss, United Nations Space Service, dug himself out to the accompaniment of a considerable amount of quiet profanity. On emerging, like a helmeted gopher from its hole, he

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promptly switched moods and began to compliment himself on his sagacity in staying put. Had he followed his impulse to try to get back to the ship, he would have headed almost directly away from it.

He tested his marshelmet radio and found it working.

"It's all over, boys. Come on in," he said into the microphone. Spacemen First Class Alvand Carder and Li Yim Tang were waiting in a low range of hills outside the storm area, about ten miles away.

"Roger," came the reply. Over the radio he didn't recognize the voice, but the addition could have come only from Li: "Have supper hot. These K-rations get drier all the time."

How sand could get into an airtight marsuit, Weiss was unable to guess. That it could was attested by his burning eyes and the grit in his mouth.

He plodded toward the ship, and again he congratulated himself, this time for jettisoning the wings and raising the *Phobos* on its tail immediately after landing. Had it been on its belly, it would have been buried.

It took Weiss a little while to dig through the drifted sand to the entrance port. The work was not hard in the low gravity, and Weiss considered going ahead and digging the rocket tubes free. But the small sun was low in the west, and it wouldn't take Carder and Li long to cover ten miles on Mars. He climbed the ladder to the airlock and let himself in.

The centerdeck was circular and big enough for three men to live in, by crowding. The bunks were tiered, with clothes lockers behind them against the curve of the hull. On one side of them was a tiny bath, separated by the ladders to other decks from a small kitchenette. On the other were the shelves of reading tapes, package after package of microfilmed data, a library of information on many subjects.

Weiss grimaced as his eyes swept the layers of microfilm. On three entire shelves, the spine of every box bore a neatly typewritten label: CARDER.

It was one of the stupid, unnecessary characteristics of the engineer-geologist. There were no boxes labeled WEISS or LI. The library was community property. It was part of the expedition. But Carder had seen fit to paste his name on every box of tape that dealt with the subjects in which he was interested.

Weiss had grown lonesome in the six days Carder and Li had been gone. He would welcome the return of companionship, but in a few days he would be chafing with irritation at Carder's presence. If the fellow weren't so rankly and unashamedly selfish!

Weiss remembered the near-fight that had occurred aboard the *Marsward*, parent vessel of the

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Phobos, during the early days of this first expedition to Mars. Carder had labeled a space suit as his own, just as he labeled the reading tapes. The *Marsward's* crew was ten, including the three members of the ground party, and when someone else had donned Carder's suit in an abandon-ship drill a terrific argument had ensued.

Carder had maintained his attitude even to Commander Walpool, the *Marsward's* heavily mustached officer-in-charge.

"I've been having complaints about this labeling mania of yours ever since we started, Carder," Walpool said then. "How the devil do you get the idea you have an exclusive right to anything aboard this vessel?"

"But, Commander, what if a meteor hits us?" asked Carder, his blue eyes wide. "I don't want to have to look all over the ship for a suit."

"There are suits to spare, and every suit fits every man well enough," snapped Walpool. "That's all, Carder."

Weiss sighed. He couldn't afford to exert the same sort of discipline Walpool employed. He outranked Li and Carder, but their specialties were so different that full cooperation among them was the watchword on this all-important ground exploration.

Weiss selected a menu of frozen steaks and packaged vegetables, and set the meal on the short-wave cooker. He unfolded the collapsible table in the middle of the centerdeck and set out the plates. Then he began a tour of inspection inside the ship.

Everything apparently was in order on the centerdeck. He would have to check the engine deck later, but anything wrong there would show up on the control board. Whistling, he climbed up to the control deck.

The voices of Carder and Li murmured from the loudspeaker. They were talking to each other over their marshelmet radios as they came in.

"I say it's a planet that died gradually as it lost its water," Li was arguing. The Chinese was navigator-botanist of the ground expedition. "That canal sage is too highly developed a plant to be a prototype."

"There's been recent volcanic activity in those hills," answered Carder. His tone was not contentious—just tenacious. "That's where the water came from for your plants. It's more likely the water and oxygen are locked up inside Mars and volcanic action is just beginning to release it."

Weiss looked out the port toward the southeast. He could see the two enlisted men in the distance, two black figures covering the plain in long easy leaps, the setting sun glinting from their marshelmets. He would have just about enough time to check the

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control board before they got there.

He flashed a practiced glance across the lighted dials. Something out of place flicked at his consciousness at once. He let his eyes move back more slowly.

One dial caught his horrified eye and held it for a long heartbeat. Then Weiss grunted as though hit in the stomach, and fled down toward the engine deck. He was sitting dejectedly on his bunk, swearing steadily, when Carder and Li swung blithely in through the airlock.

"What's up, Johnnie? The Walrus been reaming you out again?" asked Li. This irreverent reference was to mustachioed Commander Walpool.

Li unstrapped the movie camera from his side and laid it on his own bunk, above Weiss's head. Carder moved to the short-wave cooker and switched it off, sniffing. The steaks were overdone.

"Sergeant Li," said Weiss very precisely, raising unhappy black eyes to Li's Oriental face, "it appears that we are about to become the first Martian colonists. The fuel oxygen's gone."

Carder was one of those gullible men who took everything seriously. If he hadn't been, Weiss' remark about levitation would have been forgotten as the passing comment it was.

It took Carder half the night to go over the engine deck thoroughly, with Weiss and Li helping him. Personalities aside, Carder gave the orders here, for he was engineer while Weiss was pilot-meteorologist and Li was navigator.

"Everything's in order but that one tank," said Carder about midnight, straightening his thin shoulders and brushing the yellow hair back from his forehead. "Any idea how it happened, Lieutenant?"

That was Carder's way. Carder was always formal with Weiss, while Li ignored Earthside protocol and addressed him jovially as "Johnnie." Too, there was a hint of accusation in Carder's question now that irritated Weiss, but nothing definite enough to justify his taking offense openly.

"A sharp rock in that sandstorm, I suppose," answered Weiss, shortly. "I don't know. The important thing is that, without that oxygen, our hydrazine's about as much good as so many tons of sand. What can we do about it, Carder?"

"I don't know, sir. Of course, we still have the breathing oxygen, but all of that wouldn't ignite enough hydrazine to get us a foot off the ground. There's plenty of oxygen in these rocks—even in the air—but we don't have any way of concentrating it in the tank."

"Is there any substitute, Al?" asked Li.

"Nitric acid," answered Carder. "We won't find that in free form, either."

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"That's just fine," said Weiss sardonically. "If we're ever going to get the *Phobos* off this sand flat, it looks like it'll have to be by levitation."

Carder's baby blue eyes widened and the tip of his long nose twitched.

"Levitation, Lieutenant?" he repeated. "What's that?"

"Raising it by mental power," snapped Weiss and turned away.

The three of them went to the control deck, and Weiss raised the *Marsward,* a bright star rising in the west, on the radio. Commander Walpool's reaction was pointed and caustic. When he had flayed the three members of the landing party individually and collectively for being caught away from the *Phobos* by a sandstorm, he got down to the situation.

"You'll have to get out of it yourself, if it can be done," he said. "We could work out a descending spiral so food or medical supplies could be parachuted down to you. But you know as well as I do the ship has no reserve oxygen beyond the minimum required to get us back to Earth."

"Our food will outlast our breathable oxygen, and we can find water," replied Weiss. "Carder says our oxygen will last about eighteen months."

"You'll be dead long before a rescue ship can get back from Earth," said Walpool bluntly. "Put Carder on, and we'll see if he and the engineers here can work out some way of manufacturing you a fuel supply."

The three men knew the *Marsward* could not help them. Built for space and fueled only for the round trip voyages, it could not land on Mars. A radio message could reach Earth, but the *Marsward* itself could get back and be refueled before another space ship could be built. The *Marsward* could not even hasten its return to Earth—it had to wait 343 days until Earth and Mars were in the proper orbital positions.

Weiss, Carder and Li, first Earthmen to set foot on Mars, would live to watch the *Marsward* blast off on the return voyage to Earth. Their oxygen supply would not hold out until aid from Earth could reach them.

"I'll bet five thousand dollars to a busted sou they'll send more than one landing boat on the next expedition," said Li at breakfast the next morning. "Of course, that won't help us any."

Appropriations trouble in the United Nations congress had caused the *Marsward* to blast off from Earth with only one landing boat instead of the three that had been recommended. It had been a matter either of making the trip with the single landing boat or not making it at all.

"Well, Carder, what are the prospects of getting away from here?" asked Weiss. Weiss and Li had gone

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to bed the night before, leaving Carder to discuss ways and means with the *Marsward's* engineers.

"Not very good, sir," answered Carder. There were dark circles under his blue eyes. "We don't have the equipment to liquefy oxygen, and neither does the *Marsward*. Ozone's a dangerous substitute, but you have to start with oxygen to get ozone. Nitric acid is the only oxidizer possible for us."

"Nitric acid?" repeated Weiss. "Didn't you say yesterday we couldn't find nitric acid on Mars?"

"Yes, sir," answered Carder. "You don't find anything but traces of it anywhere. But the chemists aboard the *Marsward* suggested we jury-rig some equipment and distil it. We ought to be able to find the raw materials in those hills—they're loaded with mineral deposits."

"What'll we need, Al?" asked Li.

"Mainly saltpeter and sulphur," answered Carder. "Lieutenant, do you think there's any chance of lifting the *Phobos* with this levitation you were talking about?"

Weiss sat there with his mouth open. But Li, a born joker, jumped into the breach quickly.

"Why don't you try it, Al?" he suggested, with a slant-eyed wink at Weiss. "You'd not only rescue us from exile, you'd be the most famous engineer on Earth."

"But I don't know how it's done," said Carder seriously. "What equipment would I have to have?"

"Now, Li, our position's too serious—" began Weiss uncomfortably.

"Don't be a martyr, Johnnie," interrupted Li, grinning. "Life's too short. You don't need any equipment, Al. You just have to know how."

"I've never seen it mentioned in engineering literature," said Carder, his blue eyes puzzled. "Is it a propulsion method that would work in the Martian atmosphere, Li?"

"It should work better on Mars because of the lighter gravity," replied Li gravely. "You see, Al, it's a lost art that modern science hasn't been able to resurrect. What you do is concentrate on whatever it is you want to levitate, and will that it rise up. If your will's strong enough, up it goes."

"I don't know how strong my will is, but I'm willing to try," said Carder doubtfully. "But I don't know just how to start."

"I'd recommend you start with something lightweight, like Li's head," said Weiss sarcastically. "Now, look here, Carder, you forget this levitation foolishness and get started on the nitric acid business."

Carder stared at him, his nose twitching slightly.

"I didn't ask about it to be foolish, Lieutenant," he said. "Before we can manufacture nitric acid, we've got to have an energy source

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that will give us plenty of heat. There isn't enough oxygen in the Martian atmosphere to support combustion."

He got to his feet slowly, donned his marsuit and went through the airlock.

"Can you imagine a nut like that, Li?" demanded Weiss. "He spouts all that chemistry, then swallows your guff about levitation."

Li was standing at the port beside the airlock, looking out. He began laughing.

"He swallowed it . . . but completely!" choked Li, pointing. "Look at that!"

Puzzled, Weiss went to the port and looked out. Carder was on his hands and knees in the sand, about fifty feet from the ship. He was staring fixedly at a spade lying on the ground in front of him.

"What in hell is he doing?" asked Weiss. "Has he gone space happy?"

"No more so than usual," laughed Li. "He's trying to levitate the spade!"

The *Phobos* was equipped with a small truck which had been little used so far. The terrain of the nearby hills, richest field of exploration they had found, was too rough for easy driving, and a good deal of the landing boat's power supply was required to charge the truck's electric engines for a long drive.

The trio spent the morning digging the boat's rocket tubes free of drifts from the sandstorm. That afternoon at a conference, it was decided that Weiss and Carder would take the truck into the hills the next day to locate the deposits necessary for the manufacture of nitric acid. Carder went below to set aside the equipment.

Weiss went to his bunk and broke out his service pistol. Li watched him with interest. Carbines had been the standard armament on exploratory jaunts before.

"I don't like this business of being tied up with Carder for a week or two," said Weiss, with an embarrassed note to his voice. "I don't see how you get along with him so well, Li. I can't stand the fellow."

"He's peculiar, but he has a brilliant mind underneath it all," said Li. "Is that why you're taking the pistol, Johnnie—for Al?"

"I don't trust him," said Weiss heavily. "There isn't much chance for selfishness to show up on an expedition like this, where everybody has to pull together, but you'll have to admit that Carder is selfish. Has it occurred to you that the breathing oxygen that will last the three of us only eighteen months will last one man fifty-four months?"

"I don't think Al would do anything like that," said Li slowly. "I'll agree that he's selfish, but he's no criminal."

"I think he's unbalanced. I'm not taking any chances."

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The truck had been brought down disassembled and set up after landing. It was to have been abandoned when the *Phobos* blasted off again. At dawn the next day, Weiss and Carder climbed into it and jounced off to the hills.

It was autumn in this hemisphere of Mars, and the dying canal sage exploded into powder beneath the tires. When they reached the hills, Carder guided the truck along a series of ravines, then up a rocky slope to the knoll on which he and Li had left the small plastic dome on their last trip out.

"We may as well work from here, Lieutenant. There's as good a chance of finding the minerals we need around here as anywhere else," said Carder, waving his arms around when they alighted from the truck. The weathered hills and gullies were a garish abstraction of yellows, reds and purples. What sparse vegetation they once boasted had crumbled in the autumn cold.

The men transferred their equipment to the dome and Weiss began the job of setting up housekeeping while Carder at once took to the gullies to ferret out the needed materials. Weiss wore his marshelmet, and the radio kept them in as close touch with each other as if they had been together.

"The ground looks good for saltpeter through here," said Carder after a while. "Tell me, Lieutenant, how complete is your technical information on levitation?"

"Carder, hadn't it occurred to you that you might be the butt of a joke on this thing?" asked Weiss in some exasperation.

"Yes, sir. I thought Li might be joking with me. People are always pulling my leg, you know. But I've been thinking about it, and I think I've figured out the physical principle of levitation."

"And what might that be?" demanded Weiss. "Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps?"

"Magnetic," answered Carder soberly. "Li said it's done with the mind, and the only way the mind could be involved directly would be for the electrochemical potential of the brain to be concentrated to alter the gravitomagnetic field of the planet. It would be a localized nullification of gravity."

"I'd suggest you establish a localized nullification of conversation and pay attention to finding the ingredients for nitric acid," snapped Weiss.

Carder didn't find saltpeter that day, but he did find sulphur.

"Must be an extinct volcano, sir," he said. His eyes glistened as he pointed out the yellow veins in the gully to Weiss. "It's pure sulphur, quite a bit of it. And there are limestone deposits about two miles away from here, so there's a good chance of finding saltpeter. Maybe you'd better start loading the truck with the sulphur, Lieutenant, while I look for the saltpeter. It's going to take quite a lot

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of both of them to make fifty tons of nitric acid."

After supper Weiss, exhausted, went to bed immediately. Some time during the night he was awakened by a murmur inside the ten-foot dome. By the light of Mars's two tiny moons, he saw Carder sitting on his own bunk, his back to Weiss. Carder had his marshelmet on and was talking over its radio.

Curious, Weiss quietly reached below his bunk for his own helmet and put it on. He tuned in the radio. Carder was talking to Li, back at the *Phobos*.

". . . may have been widely known in ancient times, and certainly is a part of traditional Oriental knowledge," Li was saying seriously. "Conventional science has ignored such phenomena as table lifting in spiritualistic seances. I think there were some suggestions during the historic mid-century flying saucer scare that they might be vessels operated by the principle. . . ."

Manual labor was not easy in the light Martian gravity, but it was fast. Weiss finished loading the truck with sulphur the next morning and drove the load back to the *Phobos*. Carder remained in the hills to poke around for signs of the saltpeter they needed.

"Look, Li, this levitation joke has gone far enough," Weiss said as he and the navigator were eating lunch together on the center-deck. "Carder might just find some way of getting us off of here if he works at it. He certainly won't if his mind is taken up with this foolishness."

"I suppose you're right, Johnnie," admitted Li contritely. "I'll straighten it out."

He didn't, though. Weiss heard the exchange as he drove back to the dome in the truck.

"Maybe you were joking, but didn't you tell me people used levitation once?" Carder demanded when Li confessed.

"There've been stories about it for hundreds of years," conceded Li. "But they haven't been authenticated. They're just fairy tales, Al."

"A lot of fairy tales have been based on reality," argued Carder stubbornly. "I think my theory of levitation is valid. I think it's possible. All I have to do is find a way to do it."

Weiss said nothing to Carder, but he lit in on Li with both feet when he returned to the *Phobos* the following day with another truckload of sulphur.

"You got him started. You get him stopped," ordered Weiss.

Li looked at him with innocent black eyes.

"I'll try, but I'm going to have to figure out some approach besides just telling Al I was joking," he said. "The trouble is, it isn't my joke any more. It's Al's theory."

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"Theory, hell!" exploded Weiss. "We don't have time for theories. We've got less than a terrestrial year to make fifty tons of fuel and get off this rock. Carder can theorize all he pleases when we get back to Earth!"

"Well," said Li, "he's stubborn. And, if you ask me, Johnnie, he's thinking as much about the glory and money involved in finding a new propulsion method as he is about a fuel to get us off Mars."

Towing the atomic engine to the *Phobos* was a two-day job. It landed twenty miles away from the boat, on the opposite side from the range of hills. Even so, it was pretty accurate shooting, because the crew aboard the *Marsward* had to plot a descending spiral and allow for the drop through the atmosphere by parachute.

Dropping the engine was a risky proposition for the *Marsward*. Even if Weiss, Li and Carder managed to lift the *Phobos*, the engine could not be taken up with it. It meant that, until the return to Earth, the *Marsward* would have to depend on its solar mirrors for all routine power supplies. Of course, the engine had been included on the expedition as an experimental proposition, with an eye to later exploration of the outer planets, but it represented a substantial safety margin in the *Marsward's* power supply.

When the sweating trio had set up the engine beside the *Phobos* at last, Weiss breathed a sigh of relief.

"Things are looking up," he said. "How soon can we get down to work, Carder?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Carder soberly. "I haven't found any satisfactory deposit of saltpeter yet, and we're going to have to find water—lots of water."

"Water? On Mars?" demanded Weiss. "What the hell? This is the first I've heard about needing water. What do we have to have lots of water for?"

"Source of hydrogen and oxygen, sir. You don't get it in sulphur and saltpeter, and that's what makes the nitric acid a good oxidizer. We'll have to use lots of steam to make sulphuric acid out of the sulphur, then heat the sulphuric acid and saltpeter—Chile saltpeter's what we need—to make the nitric acid."

Weiss and Li frowned their dismay.

"Not only that, sir," Carder continued, "it's going to be a slow process because there's so little oxygen in the Martian air. I think your idea would be better, Lieutenant, if we could work it out."

"My idea?" asked Weiss.

"Levitation, sir. If I could figure out the principle of it, I think I could rig up an amplifier—"

"Levitation be damned!" interrupted Weiss angrily. "For cripe's sake, Carder, get in there and get the truck outfitted to go back into the hills!"

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Carder climbed morosely into the *Phobos*. Weiss looked at Li, furiously. Li spread his hands.

"I'm sorry, Johnnie," he said. "But it's a tough proposition to get him off of something like this. You remember the space dust, don't you?"

Weiss did, indeed, remember the space dust. He never had understood how Carder, a veteran of three Moon trips, could fall for it. But some wag aboard the *Marsward* had told Carder there was a belt of meteors between Earth and Mars composed of pure gold. Describing the location, he had told Carder a man could make himself rich just by catching enough of these tiny golden motes.

At the speed the spaceship traveled, there was always a certain amount of space dust that kept pace with it, drawn into its feeble gravitational field as it swept a path through space. For millions of miles, Carder had clung to the outside of the ship in a spacesuit, trying to collect space dust in a bucket. He got about half a pound of it and was disappointed and incredulous when analysis showed there was no gold in his catch.

"Plain gullible," agreed Weiss, "and stubborn as a mule. But you have more influence with him than I do, Li. You'll have to figure out some way to stop him mooning over this yoga stuff."

"Yoga," repeated Li reflectively. "Maybe that's an angle."

If it had been a harmless pastime Carder indulged in after supper, Weiss wouldn't have minded. But Carder had emphasized the time that would be required to manufacture fifty tons of nitric acid with the equipment they had, even after they got the materials, and Weiss was aware of it himself. Every now and then he would catch Carder concentrating, trying to levitate some object, when there was important work to be done, and he felt sure that Carder's interest in the thing was interfering with his task of locating saltpeter in the hills.

This time Li and Carder went out to explore the hills. Weiss stayed at the *Phobos* to relay every scrap of information they had garnered about Mars, for recording on the *Marsward's* tapes. If it developed that the men of the *Phobos* were doomed to remain in Martian exile, at least the things they had learned about the planet would go back to Earth to help the next expedition.

Weiss stood at the control deck port and watched Li and Carder drive away in the truck. The loudspeaker was turned up so he could hear their conversation.

Dawn on Mars was always sudden. One moment, it seemed, the truck was just an indistinct blot in the gray dimness outside, and the next it was sharply outlined in the light that burst across the barren plain. Its long shadow raced

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ahead of it as it dwindled in the direction of the hills.

"Look, Al, if people have been trying for centuries to solve the phenomenon of levitation, how do you expect to do it in less than a year?" asked Li, who was driving the truck. "Don't you think it would be better if you concentrated on getting us off Mars, and worry about your theory when we get back to Earth?"

"You don't seem to realize how slim our chances are, Li," answered Carder slowly. "The *Phobos* was built to use oxygen as an oxidizer for the hydrazine hydrate. With some engine adjustments, pure nitric acid may substitute for the oxygen. With the equipment we have, we'll be lucky if we can make fifty tons of sixty per cent pure nitric acid in the time we have—and I'm almost sure the rocket engines won't work with only sixty per cent nitric acid."

Fear settled around Weiss' throat like a chilly collar. He hadn't realized before that the technical problem was such a difficult one. Carder just didn't say much about his engineering to non-engineers, except when it was necessary.

"You told me yourself that science had ignored levitation, Li," Carder continued accusingly. "You told me yourself there was evidence that it exists. I'm an engineer. I'm a geologist. I'm a scientist. I just think that if this levitation exists, like you said, a scientist can unravel it by applying science to it. It's a little different from the average person stumbling around with it."

It appeared to Weiss that Li was banging his head against a stone wall, trying to convince Carder. He reckoned without Li's native subtlety.

"You've got a good theory, Al," said Li warmly, "and it may be a great contribution to science when we get back to Earth. But you're the wrong kind of fellow to succeed with it."

"What do you mean?" demanded Carder. "I've just been telling you—"

"That's just it. You've been educated in materialistic Western science. The reason science hadn't discovered levitation is that levitation is part of a field science hasn't penetrated yet. It's the field of mental phenomena—telepathy, teleportation, psychokinesis. That's what levitation is: psychokinesis, the same thing that makes some people able to control the fall of the dice.

"You may as well face it, Al. Your thinking is in a straitjacket. It's materialistic. According to all the legends about it, levitation on a broad scale succeeded only with the Oriental philosophers."

"You're Oriental," Carder pointed out.

"Only in my physical heritage. I was reared in the Western scientific culture. The only Westerners

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who ever have succeeded with things like levitation and telepathy were uneducated persons, usually of an unstable nervous temperament, whose thoughts weren't molded to a practical, materialistic way of thinking."

"Logic is logic," insisted Carder. "If a theory is valid, it works, and temperament has nothing to do with it."

"Temperament does when the fuse that ignites your lifting force is mental and emotional," replied Li. "Unless you're born with the gift, your mind has to be trained rigidly to a task like that. It's like an engine, Al. That atomic engine has enough power to lift the *Phobos,* but we can't lift it with the atomic engine because it's the wrong kind of power. It's not propulsive power. You can't lift the *Phobos* with a mind trained in the Western scientific tradition, either —not directly, that is.

"But we can use the power from the atomic engine to make the kind of power that will lift the *Phobos.* And you can use your kind of thinking to create the power that will lift the *Phobos,* by concentrating on making nitric acid."

It was a persuasive argument. Carder thought it over.

"That's reasonable," he agreed. "But direct power would be so much simpler. You know something about this levitation, Li. How did the Orientals train their minds?"

"Very long and difficult, Al," said Li. Weiss could almost hear his sigh of relief over the radio. "Nobody really knows unless he's one of the initiated. You have to learn to control your mind and emotions, and the whole thing ends up with a period of complete isolation, fasting, abstinence and thinking pure thoughts. It's always been a religious proposition in the East."

"We couldn't be much more isolated," said Carder reflectively. Weiss, gazing at the tight Martian horizon, agreed with him. The truck was out of sight now, and nothing broke the monotony of the brown lowland plain but the low, rolling hills to the northwest.

"Three's a crowd," retorted Li. "These old prophets and mystics went off in the desert or the mountains with nothing but a crooked staff. Besides, you're too selfish to think pure thoughts, Al. No offense, but if you'll think it over you'll see it's true."

"I'll promise you this," said Carder after a long silence. "I won't try to do any more work on levitation until we've found saltpeter and water and gotten started on making nitric acid. But I won't forget it."

Weiss was tempted to butt into the conversation and ask Carder why, if he was interested in direct power, he didn't try to develop an atomic drive, something scientists were seeking avidly. But he re-

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frained. He didn't want Carder to start off on a new tangent.

The *Marsward* was below the horizon, and couldn't be reached by radio for some time yet. Weiss put his marsuit on and went outside. There was no hint of trouble anywhere in the steel-blue sky, but Weiss determined not to get more than fifty feet away from the *Phobos*. He didn't want to get caught a second time.

The heavy, almost featureless, atomic engine snuggled up against the rocket tubes of the landing boat. Close by, the sulphur was piled. Scattered near were the beginnings of some vessels and retorts Carder had started. A thin wind blew, stirring the top of the sand slightly.

Isolation. Isolation was complete except for the voices of Carder and Li, which still murmured in his marshelmet earphones. Weiss reached up and switched off the helmet radio.

Weiss looked up at the dully gleaming cylinder of the *Phobos* that towered high above him. It was a beautiful piece of machinery, but without oxygen—or nitric acid—it was dead. It might as well be a stone building.

Only men could put life back into it. He corrected himself: only men's *minds;* for the oxygen and nitric acid it had to have were not lying around loose for the uninstructed brawn of man to pick up. Its original life, the power of it that had brought them safely down to the surface of Mars, had been the product of men's minds. All the explosive potentialities of all the oxygen and hydrogen on Earth could not have put Weiss, Li and Carder on Mars without the catalyst of the human mind.

Well, what about levitation? Some scientists were paying serious attention to psychokinesis and other extrasensory abilities; and that was all levitation was. If the mind could lift the *Phobos* one way, might it not be able to lift it another way?

His mind followed a logical chain of thought. Science was investigating psychokinesis: *ergo,* there must be evidence of its existence. There was evidence of its existence: *ergo,* that evidence must be the reported instances of it before science became interested. Those people had succeeded with it: *ergo,* they must have had an ability denied to the average person. Why?

Weiss didn't for an instant believe that, if levitation existed, there was anything supernatural about it. Nor did he believe there were especially gifted individuals, whose brains differed physically from the rest of humanity in such a way that they were able to achieve psychokinesis thereby. It must be, as Li had suggested, in the mental and emotional attitude.

The old saints, the Hindu holy men: weren't they the people sup-

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posed to have such powers? What did they stress? Unselfishness, love of one's fellow man, humility, sincerity of purpose; but those weren't qualities that had anything to do with scientific thought, as Weiss knew it.

He became aware that for several minutes he had been standing, staring at the tall bulk of the *Phobos,* willing it to lift itself up from the sand. He was frowning in his concentration.

Weiss started to swear at himself, then didn't. He switched on the helmet radio, and the voice of Li and Carder, arguing whether Mars was a dying planet or a young one, filled his ears.

Feeling extremely foolish, Weiss climbed back into the *Phobos.*

Carder's surrender to practicality probably had nothing to do with it, but things moved fast after that. Carder found saltpeter and a suprisingly large water supply, for Mars, in a limestone cave that day. When he and Li returned with a truckload of saltpeter, it was Weiss's turn to team up with Li in a regular run back and forth from the hills to bring in supplies of sulphur, saltpeter and, at last, water. Carder stayed at the *Phobos* to build the equipment they needed for their task, from the discarded wing structures.

By the time Carder had completed his outdoor laboratory, up against the side of the *Phobos,* Weiss and Li had brought him quite a stockpile of materials. It was mid-autumn by now, but there was neither the time nor the material to build a shelter around the equipment against the increasing cold and the danger of sandstorms.

There was a burner to convert the sulphur ore into sulphur dioxide. Then the burner gas was channeled into chambers to convert it, at a 435° temperature, to sulphur trioxide and then, by absorption in water, into sulphuric acid. Weiss and Li were properly impressed by Carder's accomplishment, but he warned them that, as his equipment was "home made" and he had no catalyst, they could hardly expect the fastest and most efficient production.

Next to this equipment were the stills in which the saltpeter would be distilled with the sulphuric acid and the resulting nitric acid transferred into the now-repaired fuel oxygen tank of the *Phobos.*

Carder gave them careful instructions in the procedure to be followed in his manufacturing operations.

"If you run into any trouble, the engineers on the *Marsward* can help you," he concluded.

"Hold it," said Weiss. "You're going to be in charge of this operation. Li and I will operate the truckline and bring the materials to you. We're not chemists."

"You ought to know how it's done, anyhow," insisted Carder.

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"It's a simple operation, and something might happen to me."

That was a reasonable precaution, and Weiss made nothing more of it until he and Li returned with a tank of water aboard the truck a few weeks later. Carder was nowhere to be seen around the outdoor laboratory.

"You get started unloading the water into the tanks, Li," said Weiss. "I'll find Carder."

He climbed into the *Phobos*. Evidently, he thought, Carder was at work inside the ship and didn't have the loudspeakers turned up. If he had known the truck was coming in, he surely would have been outside to supervise the unloading.

Weiss took off his marshelmet and shouted:

"Carder!"

His voice reverberated in the close confines of the landing boat, but there was no answer. He shouted again. Still no answer.

Swearing softly, Weiss descended through the supply deck to the engine deck. The machinery, the dials, the levers, stood silent and unattended. Carder was not there.

Weiss climbed the length of the ship to the control deck. There was no one there. Carder was not aboard the *Phobos*.

Puzzled and beginning to get angry, Weiss put on his helmet again and went outside. Li was standing beside the truck, watching the water drain into the storage tanks.

"Li, is Carder out there?" Weiss asked before he was clear of the airlock.

"No. Isn't he aboard?"

"Hell, no. Where could that nut have gone?"

Weiss began to cast around for tracks in the sand. It was a futile effort. There were too many tracks, and the autumn wind drifted the sand swiftly.

Li finished his work and the two men climbed back into the *Phobos* together. There was a folded note on the steel table of the centerdeck. Weiss had missed it in his search of the ship.

He picked it up, read it and handed it silently to Li.

"Friend Li," said the note in Carder's uneven scrawl. *"Have gone into the desert. Couldn't find a crooked staff so taking one of the spades."*

After two weeks, Weiss and Li gave Carder up for dead.

Carder had left behind the radio equipment from his marshelmet, so there was no possibility of communicating with him. He had taken a small supply of food and a smaller supply of water. He had vanished completely.

His companions spent several days searching the range of hills, the only area within walking distance where he might find a hiding place. In view of the small

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amount of water Carder had taken, they utilized an entire day exploring the limestone cavern where they got their saltpeter and water.

They abandoned the search under pressure of the urgent necessity of getting the nitric acid manufactured to blast off from Mars.

"What do you suppose got into that nut?" Weiss asked. "If he'd taken all the oxygen, I'd figure he planned to sit it out until the *Marsward* can get back from Earth with another landing boat. But this doesn't make sense."

"I hate to say it about him," said Li, "but I'm afraid that whatever plan Al has in mind is for the benefit of Al and no one else."

"You don't think he's serious about traipsing off to work out this levitation theory of his?"

"I don't know. Al's pretty credulous, but I didn't think he was that stupid. If he really takes his theory seriously, though, Johnnie, I wouldn't put it past him to sacrifice our chances of getting back to Earth just in the wild hope of making himself rich and famous."

"Damn it, Li, if we don't get off, he doesn't either. What good's wealth and fame to a man without oxygen? I don't trust Carder. We're going to set up an alarm system in the airlock just in case he decides to sneak back and knock us off to get all the breathing oxygen supply for himself."

"Al's not vicious. It would be more his style to stay out there working on his pet theory, then come contritely back just in time to blast off with us," predicted Li.

"And let us do all the work! Damned if I don't kick him off the boat if he does!"

But after two weeks they agreed Carder must be dead. Even Carder would have sense enough to come back after two weeks alone in the Martian desert, they decided.

The most inconvenient thing about Carder's desertion was that it threw the entire load of making nitric acid on Weiss and Li. That meant one of them had to keep the truck rolling to the hills and back, with only a single man to load the water and ore, while the other worked on the manufacturing process at the boat. Besides, there were the routine tasks aboard the *Phobos* to perform, and the frequent radio reports to the *Marsward*. These radio sessions now were lengthened by the necessity of having the *Marsward*'s engineers oversee their chemical manufacturing operations at long distance.

The production of nitric acid went slowly, very slowly. But it was not slowed by a shortage of ingredients. There had been sufficient stockpiles before Carder left for a single man operating the truck shuttle to keep them up.

They heard from Carder once. Neither of them was able to explain that contact. It came when

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their water hole in the limestone cavern ran dry at last.

"It throws a serious crimp into our progress," said Weiss, reporting to the *Marsward* on the radio, "and I don't know whether we can afford it. It means that one of us is going to have to take time out to search the hills for another water supply, and God knows how long that'll take."

"That's bad news, Weiss," said Commander Walpool. "You know the *Marsward* can't wait on you. We have to blast off for Earth at zero hour. Time's getting short and . . ."

His voice faded away. As Weiss twiddled the volume dial frantically, a new, strong voice came in over the loudspeaker.

"Lieutenant, this is Sergeant Carder," said the voice. "You'll find another water supply in a cave half a mile northeast of the one you've been using."

"Carder!" exclaimed Weiss, gripping the microphone. "What the hell? Carder, where are you? Carder? Carder!"

There was no reply. There was a moment of silence, then Walpool's voice came back in on the loudspeaker as though there had been no interruption.

"How do you account for that?" Weiss asked Li when he had told his Chinese colleague of the incident later. "It was Carder's voice, I'm sure."

"I don't know. Al sure didn't take any radio equipment with him. Maybe he built a transmitter, wherever he is."

"With what? And how could he come in on this loudspeaker without being heard on the *Marsward*? They were on the same channel, you know."

"Directional beam, maybe, or perhaps his output was too low to reach the *Marsward*. Anyhow, it proves Al's still alive."

That was proved by something else, too. They found more water where Carder had directed them to look.

Although their work was not interrupted, it was an agonizingly slow process for a race against the *Marsward*'s blastoff date, as the Martian fall chilled into a bitter winter.

"I feel like the Ancient Mariner," said Li morosely one day. "This red sand around us is full of oxygen, and we can't get at it."

They had no way of knowing the total weight of the nitric acid they had produced, or its purity. Their only gauge was the dial of the fuel oxygen tank.

The dial crept slowly past the half-full mark, with maddening torpor toward the full mark. They delayed their attempt to blast off beyond a reasonable allowance for a margin of error, in a futile attempt to fill the tank.

They didn't quite make it. The pointer hovered an eighth below the full mark thirty hours before

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zero hour for the *Marsward*'s blastoff to Earth.

"It's now or never, Li," said Weiss. "We may not have fuel enough to get into the approach orbit. If we don't, we'll crash back on Mars. But we can't make enough fuel in thirty more hours to make any difference. What do you say?"

"I say, go," replied Li with a smile. "My insurance is paid up."

"Right. Let's break loose the connections with the acid chambers and take a whack at it."

They strapped down in the control room and took a blastoff spiral on their tapes from the *Marsward*'s astrogator. The blastoff clock ticked down to zero second, the red light flashed on the control board and Weiss threw the switch that started the tape on its run.

The tape click-clicked through the automatic pilot in ominous stillness. There was no muffled roar of rocket blasts, there was no tremendous pressure of gravity to glue them to their cushioned seats.

"That kills it. The rockets won't fire," said Weiss resignedly when the tape had run its course. He called the *Marsward*.

"It looks like we didn't get the nitric acid pure enough, sir," Weiss told Commander Walpool. "I'm afraid we'll be saying goodby to you."

There was the buzz of a brief conference at the other end. Then one of the *Marsward*'s engineers came in on the radio.

"It may not be the purity of the acid that's causing the trouble," said the engineer. "It may be in your nozzle settings, since you're using nitric acid instead of oxygen. It could be defective atomization or incomplete reassociation of dissociated molecules."

"That's so much Latin to me, and I never got beyond Caesar's Gallic Wars," said Weiss. "What can we do about it?"

"If one of us could get down to you, we could tell what the trouble is, though we might not be able to correct it. Or if Carder were there, he could do it. As it is, the only thing to do is for you fellows to go to the engine deck and let us try to do a long distance inspection job over the intercom."

It was too late now to catch the *Marsward* on this circuit, but the ship would be back in position three times more on its circum-Martian orbit before the blastoff for Earth. Much of this time it would be below the horizon, and radio communication would be impossible.

Weiss plugged the radio receiver into the intercom system. He and Li descended to the engine deck. He looked glumly at the maze of machinery, familiar ground to an engineer perhaps, but known only in the most general terms to them.

Li was looking out the engine deck port.

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"Looks like we'll have some expert help, Johnnie," he said quietly. "Here comes Al."

It had to be Carder, for there was no other man on Mars. He was a black figure approaching from the direction of the hills.

Weiss climbed hastily to the control deck to flash a message to the *Marsward,* then he went out with Li to meet Carder.

"Let's keep separated a little," Weiss told Li. "You remember what I said: he might come back and try to knock us off to get all the oxygen supply for himself."

They met Carder a quarter of a mile from the boat. They shook hands with him, warily. There could be no connected conversation until they returned to the *Phobos,* because Carder's marshelmet was without a radio.

"Where on Earth—Mars—have you been, Carder?" demanded Weiss when Carder had removed his helmet on the centerdeck. Carder kept his marsuit on.

"In the hills," said Carder. There was a change in his voice, something they did not remember about the little man before. His blue eyes held a new awareness.

"Why didn't you take a helmet radio, Al?" asked Li. "We thought you were dead, until you came in on the boat radio. And how did you manage that? Build a transmitter?"

"There's no time for questions now," said Carder firmly. "We've got to lighten the ship for lifting."

"Lighten, helll" snorted Weiss. "The damn rockets won't fire, Carder. Think you can get them adjusted?"

"The ship has to be lightened," said Carder. His voice was as calm as his eyes. "It may make no difference, but we'll get just one try. You and Li throw out everything above that can go. Everything. Just keep the navigation and radio equipment. I'll take care of the engine deck."

Carder went below. Grumbling, Weiss set out with Li to follow his instructions. Carder was the engineer. He was the only one who could get them out of here. If he said the ship had to be lightened, they could do nothing but lighten it.

There were chairs and tables to be unbolted, heavy equipment to lug up and down to the airlock and throw out on the wind-whipped red sands. They ate cold snacks on the job, and slept short hours.

Carder, meanwhile, stayed below on the engine deck, presumably making what adjustments had to be made. He said nothing to them, and their occasional efforts to talk to him brought sharp retorts to "keep working."

The *Marsward* swung again past the point in its orbit at which the *Phobos* would have to blast off to intercept it. A second time it swept

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past the critical point, while they worked aboard the *Phobos*. It approached zero point the third time —the last time.

"Carder, you said keep the navigation and radio equipment," said Weiss into the intercom. "You didn't mean to throw out the automatic pilot, too, did you?"

"Yes," replied Carder. "The manual control board, too, if you can get it loose."

"You figuring on trying to operate those rocket engines manually, down there?"

There was no reply.

When Weiss and Li had finished, Weiss went down to the engine deck. But the compartment door between it and the supply deck was locked against him. He banged angrily on it without result, then climbed to the control deck.

"Carder, what's the idea of locking us out of the engine deck?" he demanded over the intercom.

"You have no business down here," replied Carder. "You and Li strap down. We're ready to lift."

"It's too early," objected Weiss. "It's forty-five minutes before zero."

"Will you please do as I say?" asked Carder, a touch of exasperation in his voice. "I know what I'm doing."

Li came crawling up into the control deck, and the two of them strapped down for acceleration in the cushioned chairs.

"I suppose he wants to test the engines, Johnnie," suggested Li.

"Are you ready for lifting?" asked Carder over the intercom.

Weiss picked up the microphone. "Ready," he said.

"Here we go, then."

Weiss braced himself. Nothing happened. The seconds ticked by, drifted into minutes. Nothing happened.

"Too bad, Li," growled Weiss, beginning to unstrap. "I'd hoped Carder could pull us out of it, but the rockets just aren't going to fire. We're stuck here."

"Wait, Johnnie!" exclaimed Li, clutching his arm. "Look at the altimeter!"

Weiss leaned forward to look at the dial. There was no roar of rockets. There had been no acceleration at all. But the altimeter said the *Phobos* was three hundred feet off the ground!

Suddenly the boat jumped up with a tremendous surge that shoved Weiss back against the cushions of the chair. As suddenly, the acceleration halted, and the *Phobos* swayed from side to side, crazily. Weiss, his safety belt unbuckled, had to grab the arms of the chair to keep from being tossed to the deck.

The ship began to move upward again, but slowly.

And all the time, there was no sound, no sound of engines at all.

The acceleration was not heavy enough now to endanger them.

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Cautiously, they got out of their chairs. They staggered against each other as the deck tilted slightly.

Weiss slid back into the control chair and pulled levers on the manual control board. The *Phobos* did not respond. It was moving upward slowly, like an elevator, independently of the controls. Carder evidently had disconnected them at the engine deck level.

"Lieutenant, you'll have to tell me how to turn her," said Carder's voice over the loudspeaker. "There's no power in the controls."

"Do you suppose that nut has discovered anti-gravity?" Weiss demanded of Li.

He looked at his instruments and spoke into the microphone.

"Heel her over gently, Carder," he said. "We'll have to curve and take a spiral to intercept the *Marsward*'s orbit."

"I can hold her to any speed and direction you say, if you'll just let me know," said Carder.

The ship began to tilt, and Weiss's chair tipped to the new level. But Li stayed by the port, clinging to the handrails.

"Johnnie, there's Carder down there," he said quietly.

Weiss slid out of the chair and skidded across the floor to the port. There was a little figure down there, dark against the red sand, its arms outstretched.

And, fifty feet away from the figure, was the entire engine section of the *Phobos,* rocket tubes, fuel tanks and all! Carder had jettisoned it.

Weiss pulled himself back to the control board.

"What the devil, Carder?" he demanded into the microphone. "Why aren't you aboard?"

"I wasn't sure it would work with me aboard," answered Carder.

"Don't be ridiculous. I don't know what sort of driving mechanism you've tacked onto this crate, but your weight wouldn't make any difference."

"It isn't that, sir. You see, when I discovered the secret of this levitation and all the powers that go with it, out there in the hills, I found there were some conditions attached to it. One of them is that, whatever you do, you have to do it for someone else—not for yourself."

There was a silence. The *Phobos* curved more steeply, picking up speed toward its rendezvous with the *Marsward*. Now Weiss could see the diminishing figure of Carder from the control chair, through the starboard port.

"I found something else, too," added Carder at last. "I found something more important than going back to Earth . . . more important even than living."

"What was that, Al?" asked Li.

"I don't know. Call it peace of mind," said Carder. "Now you'd

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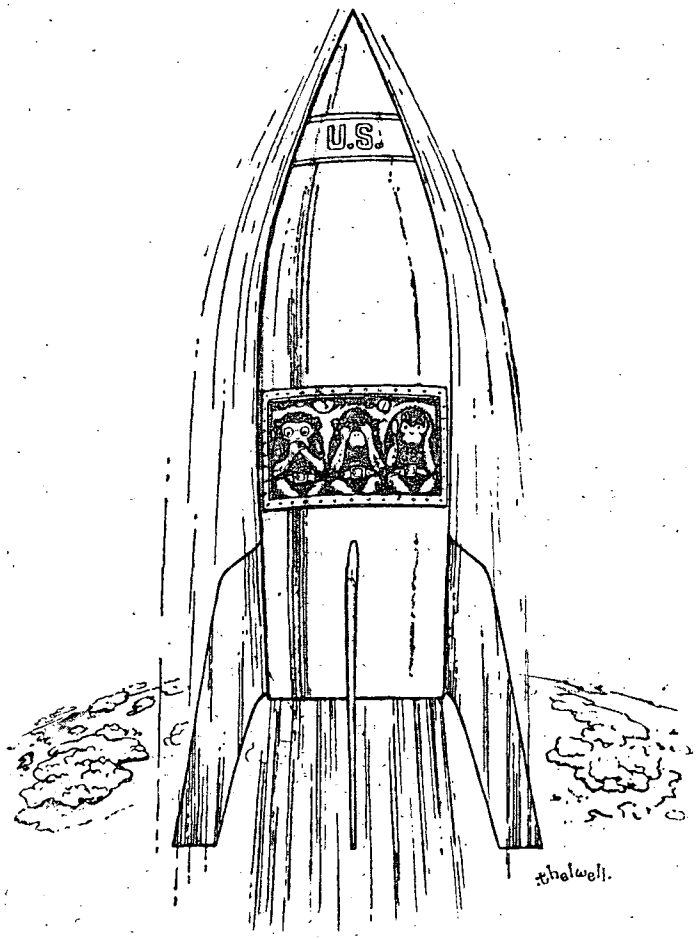
better watch the instruments if you want to navigate to the *Marsward*'s orbit."

As by unspoken consent, Li climbed to the co-pilot's chair and bent his attention to the control board. Weiss sank back in his chair feeling sick, feeling that their escape from Mars was taking him away from something that might have been in his grasp but now never could be realized.



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Last month you read here Sam Moskowitz's important historical article establishing How Science Fiction Got Its Name. *At the very time that I was discussing that article with Mr. Moskowitz, there arrived in the office this entertaining footnote, with its account of the long years that it has taken America's foremost reference index to recognize our field as anything but "pseudo-science." The serendipitous Mr. Hart is a medical editor for a pharmaceutical firm, a long-time enthusiast of science fiction, and a leading authority upon the sex organs of male crayfishes.*

"Pseudo-Science" and The Reader's Guide

by C. W. HART, JR.

The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature is one of those library standbys that sit on a shelf in a corner of the periodical room with an air of watchful complacency—an air that is probably created by the size of the volumes and their rather solid appearance; and they crouch there, toad-like in their dirty bindings, looking quite formidable to the casual magazine reader.

The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature is formidable. Each of its nineteen volumes comprises an average of 333 cubic inches and weighs several pounds. The *Guide* indexes both articles and fiction (though fiction to a lesser extent than fact) from a variety of periodicals ranging from *The Reader's Digest* and *Rotarian* to *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, The New Yorker,* and *The Atlantic.* I have not been able to determine just what criteria the *Guide* people use in selecting periodicals to index, but whatever they are there seems to be quite a bit of caprice involved. Fiction is indexed according to author, and articles by subject—with, of course, variations from volume to volume.

The first volume was a cumulative effort for the years 1900-1904, and resulted from the consolidation of *The Cumulative Index to a Selected List of Periodicals* with

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the Wilson *Reader's Guide*. *The Cumulative Index* had been started by W. H. Brett in the Cleveland Public Library and was issued for the years 1896 and 1897. The next year it was taken over by a commercial firm which issued it until 1903. *The Reader's Guide* was begun in Minneapolis in 1901 and issued a two-year cumulation in 1902. After the merger the index was issued quarterly with cumulations at the end of six, nine, and twelve month periods.

When the first *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* appeared, it indexed 67 periodicals and was edited by Miss Anna Lorraine Gutherie, a former reference librarian at the University of Minnesota. The current volume indexes 114 periodicals and has at least four editors and a managing editor—and, I imagine, a whole bevy of IBM machines in the back room. Our modern civilization seems almost incapable of functioning without these devices, and I doubt that a systematic organization like the H. W. Wilson Company has been able to resist the trend.

The H. W. Wilson Company, which was right in there pitching at the time of the merger, is still publishing the index, along with several other indices, and the way things come and go these days and change hands helter-skelter all over the place, this seems almost a remarkable feat—practically to be reckoned with the solidarity of the National Geographic Society (whose prose style usually compares favorably with that of *The Reader's Guide*).

However, in spite of its awesome aspects, *The Reader's Guide* can, with a slight expenditure of energy, be a valuable source of information, and aside from merely being an index to periodical subject matter, it can also furnish some interesting insights into our changing customs and tastes.

Being a not-too-critical but sometimes curious member of the science fiction cult, I was leafing through the *Guide* the other day in an attempt to discover just when all this space furor began. However, serendipity reared its head and the first thing that struck me was the extreme conservatism of the index system. It is almost as difficult for the editors of the *Guide* to admit the existence of some new phenomenon as it is for the editors of *The National Geographic* to steer away from the subject of Tibet. (The *Geographic* people seem to have some sort of here-we-are-in-Forbidden-Lhasa fetish. The city may be forbidden to some, but certainly not to the *Geographic* people, and they have sponsored so many expeditions to the place that their interest in it must have some more-than-passing significance.)

But getting back to science fiction, the popularity of which is increasing on a sort of logarithmic

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scale these days, *The Reader's Guide* ignored it completely for a considerable number of years, and then only with much hesitation did they admit its existence. The process took place somewhat as follows:

In Volume 10 of *The Reader's Guide* (1935-1937) an article by one C. Dane* was referred to, having the title "American Fairy Tales: Science Fiction." This is the earliest date that I can find the term "science fiction" used, although it was in use elsewhere before that time. The *Guide* lists the article under the heading PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC STORIES, complete with the hyphen. In Volume 11, the heading is still PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC STORIES and the only listing under the heading is a story by H. G. Wells called "Star" which appeared in *The Reader's Digest* at that time. The field was not crowded then, and this also happens to be an example of one of the *Guide's* caprices—listing a piece of fiction under a subject heading.

SCIENCE FICTION appeared as a heading in the *Guide* for the first time in Volume 12 (1939-1941), but then it was only to refer the reader to PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC STORIES. (The hyphen was dropped at this time.) Volume 13 waxed a bit fancy and had the heading SCIENCE IN FICTION, but all was still to little avail as the heading held nothing for itself, but referred to PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC STORIES. This particular pseudoscientific story was an article about science fiction magazines. It appeared in *The New Yorker* on February 13, 1943.

The next volume (1943-1945) produced a puzzle—at least I have been unable to fathom it to my satisfaction. There was no mention of science fiction at all! Not only that, there was no mention of pseudoscientific stories, or science-in-fiction, or science in literature—or even a hint of such things. Maybe the war had all of the science fiction writers at work making the things that they had been writing about, or pondering over the things that they would write about if they ever got home, or something. The hiatus still looks strange to me.

After the war (Volume 15) the subject continued modestly for a few years with the listing SCIENCE IN LITERATURE, *see* PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC STORIES, where there was listed an article by J. W. Campbell, Jr. entitled "Concerning Science Fiction." This seems to have been the beginning of the post-war boom in the field. Volume 16 (1947-1949) has the same heading system and lists five articles which are for the most part commentaries on the rise in popularity of science fiction.

*This abbreviation denotes the British novelist and playwright Clemence Dane, author of *Broome Stages*, *A Bill of Divorcement* and many other successes; creator of the great if neglected detective Sir John Saumarez, and probably the first "literary" figure to attempt a just and informed evaluation of pulp science fiction.—A.B.

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It was not until Volume 17 (1949-1951) that the editors of the *Guide* apparently felt that science fiction had matured enough for them to admit its existence without much beating around the bush. At this time they listed SCIENCE FICTION as such, but still did not afford it the dignity of listing the articles under that heading. They refer in turn to SCIENCE IN LITERATURE where there are listed nine commentaries on the subject, and drop the heading PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC STORIES completely. This is inexplicable, or at least the next volume is, because in the 18th volume the capricious editors revert to their old SCIENCE FICTION with a note to *see* PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC STORIES. However, this heading is a veritable gold mine of information, listing 19 articles and commentaries on the subject. The reason for this reversion can probably be traced to one of two things. Either there was in the editors at that time a really deep-seated aversion to any change in the *status quo* and their ulcers had been bothering them because of their brash step in the previous volume, or one of the IBM machines developed a conservatism of its own and failed to follow instructions.

Finally, after a twenty-year struggle, Volume 19 (1953-1955) admits science fiction to the status of a legitimate heading with no subheadings or references to other parts of the volume. This must be a real concession on the part of the editors, and it is possibly due to the overwhelming pressure of the number of articles on the subject. In this compilation there are 26 listings on the subject; 16 articles, 6 stories, and 4 bibliographies. Here, for the first time since Volume 11, there are listed stories under a subject heading! It does seem a pity that there haven't been more listings of fiction under a subject heading. Just in the science fiction field, for instance, there have been many great stories buried in such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* . . . and because the only *Guide* listings are under the authors' names. Anyway, these 26 listings certainly rate along with any other overworked field in the index, and represent contributions to a sizable percentage of the indexed periodicals. And these articles in turn reflect the presence of a vast quantity of science fiction lurking in magazines and books which may or may not be covered by the *Guide*.

What all this means, and what the editors will do next year, and what effect transistors will have on the attitudes of the IBM machines, are all things that will have to be pondered over and looked into and carefully noted. So while I am waiting to see what develops, I will just go back to the library and dig out an old *National Geographic* and read about eating rancid Yak butter on the Himalayas.

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After too long an absence, Robert Sheckley returns to F&SF—not with one of his bright topsyturvy satires (though you'll find one of them here within the next few months), but with a serious, evocative, even somewhat perturbing story of man's mind, and the welding of that mind into a weapon of interstellar invasion.

Dawn Invader

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

THERE WERE ELEVEN PLANETS IN that system, and Dillon found that the outer ones contained no life whatsoever. The fourth planet from the sun had once been populated, and the third would someday be. But on the second, a blue world with a single moon, intelligent life existed, and to this planet Dillon directed his ship.

He approached stealthily, slipping through the atmosphere under cover of darkness, descending through thick rain clouds, looking much like a cloud himself. He landed with that absolute lack of commotion possible only for an Earthman.

When his ship finally settled it was an hour before dawn, the safe hour, the time when most creatures, no matter what planet has spawned them, are least alert. Or so his father had told him before he left Earth. Invading before dawn was part of the lore of Earth, hard-won knowledge directed solely toward survival on alien planets.

"But all this knowledge is *fallible,*" his father had reminded him. "For it deals with that least predictable of entities, intelligent life." The old man had nodded sententiously as he made that statement.

"Remember, my boy," the old man went on, "you can outwit a meteor, predict an ice age, outguess a nova. But what, truthfully, can you know about those baffling and constantly changing entities who are possessed of intelligence?"

Not very much, Dillon realized. But he believed in his own youth, fire and cunning, and he trusted the unique Terran invasion technique. With that special skill, an Earthman could battle his way to the top of any environment, no matter how alien, no matter how hostile.

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From the day he was born, Dillon had been taught that life is incessant combat. He had learned that the galaxy is large and unfriendly, made up mostly of incandescent suns and empty space. But sometimes there are planets, and on these planets are races, differing vastly in shape and size, but alike in one respect: their hatred for anything unlike themselves. No cooperation was possible between these races. For an Earthman to live among them called for the utmost in skill, stamina and cunning. And even then, survival would be impossible without Earth's devastating technique of invasion.

Dillon had been an apt student, eager to face his destiny in the great galaxy. He had enlisted for the Exodus, not waiting to be drafted. And finally, like millions of young men before him, he had been given his own space ship and sent out, leaving small, overcrowded Earth forever behind. He had flown to the limit of his fuel. And now his destiny lay before him.

His ship rested in a clump of jungle near a thatch-roofed village, almost invisible in dense underbrush. He waited, tense behind his controls, until the dawn came up white, with red hints of sunrise in it. But no one came near, no bombs fell, no shells burst. He had to assume that he had landed undetected.

When the planet's yellow sun touched the rim of the horizon, Dillon emerged and sized up his physical surroundings. He sniffed the air, felt the gravity, estimated the sun's spectrum and power, and sadly shook his head. This planet, like most planets in the galaxy, would not support Terran life. He had perhaps an hour in which to complete his invasion.

He touched a button on his instrument panel and walked quickly away. Behind him, his ship dissolved into a gray ash. The ash scattered on the morning breeze and dispersed over the jungle. Now he was committed irrevocably. He moved toward the alien village.

As he approached he saw that the aliens' huts were crude affairs of wood and thatch, a few of hand-hewn stone. They seemed durable and sufficient for the climate. There was no sign of roads—only a single footpath leading into the jungle. There were no power installations, no manufactured articles. This, he decided, was an early civilization, one he should have no difficulty mastering.

Confidently he stepped forward, and almost bumped into an alien.

They stared at each other. The alien was bipedal, considerably taller than an Earthman, with a good cranial capacity. He wore a single striped garment wrapped around his waist. His skin was pigmented a light brown beneath gray fur. He showed no tendency to run.

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"Ir tai!" the creature said, sounds which Dillon interpreted as a cry of surprise. Looking hastily around, he saw that no other villager had discovered him yet. He tensed slightly and leaned forward.

"K'tal tai a—"

Dillon leaped like a great spring unfolding. The alien tried to dodge, but Dillon twisted in mid-air like a cat, and managed to clamp a hand around one of the alien's limbs.

That was all he needed. Now physical contact had been established. The rest should be easy.

For hundreds of years, an exploding birthrate had forced the inhabitants of Earth to migrate in ever-increasing numbers. But not one planet in ten thousand was suitable for human life. Therefore, Earth considered the possibility of altering alien environments to suit Terran needs, or changing men biologically to suit the new environments. But there was a third method which yielded the greatest returns for the least effort. This was to develop the mind-projecting tendency latent in all intelligent races.

Earth bred for it, concentrated and trained it. With this ability, an Earthman could live on any planet simply by taking over the mind of one of its inhabitants. This done, he had a body tailor-made for its environment, and filled with useful and interesting information. Once an Earthman was established, his love of competition usually carried him to a preeminent position in the new world he had invaded.

There was only one slight hitch; an alien usually resented having his mind invaded. And sometimes, he was able to do something about it.

In the first instant of penetration, Dillon sensed, with passionate regret, his own body collapsing, folding in on itself. It would dissolve immediately, leaving no trace. Only he and his host would know an invasion had taken place.

And at the end, only one of them would know.

Now, within the alien mind, Dillon concentrated entirely on the job ahead. Barriers went down one after another as he drove hard toward the center, where the I-am-I existed. When he entered that citadel and succeeded in driving out the ego now occupying it, the body would be his.

Hastily erected defenses dissolved before him. For an instant, Dillon thought that his first wild rush was going to carry him all the way. Then, suddenly, he was directionless, wandering through a gray and featureless no-man's land.

The alien had recovered from his initial shock. Dillon could sense energies slowly growing around him.

Now he was really in for a fight.

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A parlay was held in the no-man's land of the alien's mind.

"Who are you?"

"Edward Dillon, from the planet Earth. And you?"

"Arek. We call this planet K'egra. What do you want here, Dillon?"

"A little living space, Arek," Dillon said, grinning. "Can you spare it?"

"Well I'll be damned. . . . Get out of my mind!"

"I can't," Dillon said. "I have no place to go."

"I see," Arek mused. "Tough. But you *are* uninvited. And something tells me you want more than just living room. You want everything, don't you?"

"I must have control," Dillon admitted. "There's no other way. But if you don't struggle, perhaps I can leave a space for you, although it isn't customary."

"It isn't?"

"Of course not," Dillon said. "Different races can't exist together. That's a law of nature. The stronger drives out the weaker. But I might be willing to try it for a while."

"Don't do me any favors," Arek said, and broke off contact.

The grayness of no-man's land turned solid black. And Dillon, waiting for the coming struggle, felt the first pangs of self-doubt.

Arek was a primitive. He couldn't have any training in mind-combat. Yet he grasped the situation at once, adjusted to it, and was now prepared to deal with it. Probably his efforts would be feeble, but still . . .

What kind of a creature was this?

He was standing on a rocky hillside, surrounded by ragged cliffs. Far ahead was a tall range of misty blue mountains. The sun was in his eyes, blinding and hot. A black speck crawled up the hillside toward him.

Dillon kicked a stone out of his way and waited for the speck to resolve. This was the pattern of mental combat, where thought becomes physical, and ideas are touchable things.

The speck became a K'egran. Suddenly he loomed above Dillon, enormous, glistening with muscle, armed with sword and dagger.

Dillon moved back, avoiding the first stroke. The fight was proceeding in a recognizable—and controllable—pattern. Aliens usually conjured an idealized image of their race, with its attributes magnified and augmented. The figure was invariably fearsome, superhuman, irresistible. But usually, it had a rather subtle flaw. Dillon decided to gamble on its presence here.

The K'egran lunged ahead. Dillon dodged, dropped to the ground and lashed out with both feet, leaving his body momentarily exposed. The K'egran tried to parry and respond, but too slowly. The blow from Dillon's booted feet caught

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him powerfully in the stomach.

Exultantly, Dillon bounded forward. The flaw was there!

He ran in under the sword, feinted, and, while the K'egran tried to guard, neatly broke his neck with two blows of the edge of his hand.

The K'egran fell, shaking the ground. Dillon watched him die with a certain sympathy. The idealized racial fighting image was larger than life, stronger, braver, more enduring. But it always had a certain ponderousness about it, a sure and terrible majesty. This was excellent for an image—but not for a fighting machine. It meant slow reaction time, which meant death.

The dead giant vanished. Dillon thought for a moment that he had won. Then he heard a snarl behind him. He whirled, and saw a long, low black beast, panther-like, with ears laid back and teeth bared.

So Arek had reserves. But Dillon knew how much energy this kind of a fight used up. In a while, the alien's reserves would be gone. And then . . .

Dillon picked up the giant's sword and moved back, the panther advancing, until he found a high boulder against which he could set his back. A waist-high rock in front of him served as a parapet, across which the panther had to leap. The sun hung before him, in his eyes, and a light breeze blew dust in his face. He swung back the sword as the panther leaped.

During the next slow hours, Dillon met and destroyed a complete sampling of K'egra's more deadly creatures, and dealt with them as he would deal with similar animals on Earth. The rhinoceros—at least, it resembled one—was easy in spite of its formidable size and speed. He was able to lure it to a cliff edge, and goad it into charging over. The cobra was more dangerous, nearly spitting poison in his eyes before he was able to slash it in half. The gorilla was powerful, strong, and terribly quick. But he could never get his bone-crushing hands on Dillon, who danced back and forth, slashing him to shreds. The tyrranosaurus was armored and tenacious. It took an avalanche to bury him. And Dillon lost count of the others. But at the end, sick with fatigue, his sword reduced to a jagged splinter, he stood alone.

"Had enough, Dillon?" Arek asked.

"Not at all," Dillon answered, through thirst-blackened lips. "You can't go on forever, Arek. There's a limit to even your vitality."

"Really?" Arek asked.

"You can't have much left," Dillon said, trying to show a confidence he did not feel. "Why not be reasonable? I'll leave you room, Arek, I really will. I . . . well, I sort of respect you."

"Thanks, Dillon," Arek said. "The feeling is sort of mutual. Now, if you'd give in—"

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"No," Dillon said. "*My* terms."

"OK," Arek said. "You asked for it!'

"Bring it on," Dillon muttered.

Abruptly, the rocky hillside vanished.

He was standing knee-deep in a gray marsh. Great gnarled trees rank with moss rose from the still green water. Lilies white as a fish's belly jerked and swayed, although there was no breeze at all. A dead white vapor hung over the water and clung to the trees' rough bark. There was not a sound in the swamp, although Dillon sensed life all around him.

He waited, turning slowly around. He sniffed the stagnant, slow-moving air, shuffled his feet in the gluey mud, smelled the decaying fragrance of the lilies. And a realization came to him.

This swamp had never existed on K'egra!

He knew it, with the certainty with which an Earthman senses alien worlds. The gravity was different, and the air was different. Even the mud beneath his feet was unlike the mud of K'egra.

The implications came crowding in, too quickly to be sorted. Could K'egra have space travel, then? Impossible! Then how could Arek know so well a planet other than his own? Had he read about it, imagined it, or—

Something solid glanced heavily off his shoulder. In his speculation, the attack had caught Dillon off guard.

He tried to move, but the mud clung to his feet. A branch had fallen from one of the giant overhanging trees. As he watched, the trees began to sway and crackle. Boughs bent and creaked, then broke, raining down upon him.

But there was no wind.

Half stunned, Dillon fought his way through the swamp, trying to find solid ground and a space away from the trees. But the great trunks lay everywhere, and there was no solidness in the swamp. The rain of branches increased, and Dillon whirled back and forth, looking for something to fight against. But there was only the silent swamp.

"Come out and fight!" Dillon shrieked. He was beaten to his knees, stood up, fell again. Then, half-conscious, he saw a place of refuge.

He struggled to a great tree and clung tightly to its roots. Boughs fell, branches whipped and slashed, but the tree couldn't reach him. He was safe!

But then he saw, with horror, that the lilies at the base of the tree had twined their long stalks around his ankles. He tried to kick them loose. They bent like pale snakes and clung tighter to him. He slashed them loose and ran from the shelter of the tree.

"Fight me!" Dillon begged, as the branches rained around him. There was no answer. The lilies

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writhed on their stalks, reaching for him. Overhead was a whirr of angry wings. The birds of the swamp were gathering, black and ragged carrion crows, waiting for the end. And as Dillon swayed on his feet, he felt something warm and terrible touch his ankles.

Then he knew what he had to do.

It took a moment to get up his courage. Then Dillon plunged head-first into the dirty green water.

As soon as he dived, the swamp became silent. The giant trees froze against the slate sky. The lilies lost their frenzy and hung limp on their stalks. The white vapor clung motionless to the rough bark of the trees, and the birds of prey glided silently through the thick air.

For a while, bubbles frothed to the surface. Then the bubbles stopped.

Dillon came up, gasping for breath, deep scratches across his neck and back. In his hands was the shapeless, transparent creature who ruled the swamp.

He waded to a tree and swung the limp creature against it, shattering it completely. Then he sat down.

Never had he been so tired and so sick, and so convinced of the futility of everything. Why was he struggling for life, when life occupied so insignificant a part in the scheme of things? Of what significance was his instant of life, measured against the swing of the planets, or the stately flaming of the stars? And Dillon was amazed at the lewdness with which he was scrambling for existence.

The warm water lapped around his chest. Life, Dillon told himself sleepily, is nothing more than an itch on the hide of the non-living, a parasite of matter. Quantity counts, he told himself, as the water stroked his neck. What is the tininess of life compared to the vastness of non-living? If non-living is natural, he thought as the water touched his chin, then to live is to be diseased. And life's only healthy thought is the wish for death.

Death was a pleasant thought at that moment, as the water caressed his lips. There was a tiredness past resting, and a sickness past healing. Now it would be easy to let go, go down, abandon—

"Very good," Dillon whispered, pulling himself to his feet. "Very good try, Arek. Perhaps you're tired, too? Perhaps there's not much left in you but a little emotion?"

It grew dark, and in the dark something whispered to Dillon, something that looked like him in miniature, that curled itself warmly on his shoulder.

"But there are worse things than death," his miniature said. "There are things no living being can face, guilty knowledge concealed in the very bottom of the soul, loathed

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and detested, but *knowledge*, and never to be denied. Death is better than this knowledge, Dillon. Death becomes precious, and infinitely costly. Death is to be prayed for, and cunning schemes are laid to capture death—when you must face what lies at the bottom of your soul."

Dillon tried not to listen to the creature who looked so much like himself. But the miniature clung to his shoulder and pointed. And Dillon saw something forming in the darkness, and recognized its form.

"Not this, Dillon," his double pleaded. "Please, not this! Be courageous, Dillon! Choose your death! Be bold, be brave! Know how to die at the right time!"

Dillon, recognizing the shape of what was coming toward him, felt a fear he would never have imagined possible. For this was knowledge from the bottom of his soul, guilty knowledge of himself and all he ever thought he stood for.

"Quickly, Dillon!" his double cried. "Be strong, be bold, be true! *Die while you still know what you are!*"

And Dillon wanted to die. With a vast sigh of relief he began to release his hold, to let his essence slip away . . .

And couldn't.

"Help me!" he screamed.

"I can't!" his miniature screamed back. "You must do this for yourself!"

And Dillon tried again, with knowledge pressing close to his eyeballs, asked for death, begged for death, and could not let himself die.

So there was only one thing to do. He gathered his last strength and flung himself despairingly forward, at the shape that danced before him.

It disappeared.

After a moment Dillon realized that every threat was gone. He was standing alone in territory he had conquered. In spite of everything, he had won! Before him now lay the citadel, untenanted, waiting for him. He felt a wave of respect for poor Arek. He had been a good fighter, a worthy adversary. Perhaps he could spare him a little living space, if Arek didn't try to—

"That's very kind of you, Dillon," a voice boomed out.

Dillon had no time to react. He was caught in a grip so powerful that any thought of resistance was futile. Only then did he sense the real power of the K'egran's mind.

"You did well, Dillon," Arek said. "You need never be ashamed of the fight you fought."

"But I never had a chance," Dillon said.

"No, never," Arek said gently. "You thought the Earth invasion plan was unique, as most young races feel. But K'egra is ancient, Dillon, and in our time we have

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been invaded many times, physically and mentally. So it's really nothing new for us."

"You played with me!" Dillon cried.

"I wanted to find out what you were like," Arek said.

"How smug you must have felt! It was a game with you. All right, get it over with, finish it!"

"Finish what?"

"Kill me!"

"Why should I kill you?" Arek asked.

"Because—because what else can you do with me? Why should I be treated differently from the rest?"

"You met some of the others, Dillon. You wrestled with Ehtan, who had inhabited a swamp on his home planet, before he took to voyaging. And the miniature who whispered so persuasively in your ear is Oolermik, who came not too long ago, all bluster and fire, much like yourself."

"But—"

"We accepted them here, made room for them, used their qualities to complement ours. Together we are more than we had been apart."

"You live together?" Dillon whispered. "In *your* body?"

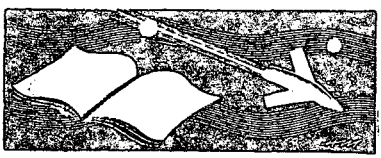
"Of course. Good bodies are scarce in the galaxy, and there's not much room for the living. Dillon, meet my partners."

And Dillon saw the amorphous swamp creature again, and the scaly-hided Oolermik, and a dozen others.

"But it can't be!" Dillon cried. "Alien races can't live together! Life is struggle and death! That's a fundamental law of nature."

"An early law," Arek said. "Long ago we discovered that cooperation means survival for all, and on far better terms. You'll get used to it. Welcome into the confederacy, Dillon!"

And Dillon, still dazed, entered the citadel, to sit in partnership with many races of the galaxy.



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Jane Roberts, the Siren of Sayre, Pa., may well be the only science-fantasy writer who was once a practicing professional evangelist. Your letters have expressed your delight with Miss Roberts' first story, The Red Wagon *(F&SF, December, 1956); I think you'll find, in this acute first-hand footnote on the perils of evangelism, even more striking evidence that hers is a genuinely fresh and individual talent, highly welcome in the field. (And doubly welcome when it comes in so attractive a package. Memo to Art Dept.: How about using authors for covers?)*

The Canvas Pyramid

by JANE ROBERTS

THE TOWN WAS FLAT. The sun baked men's bones into hard loaves and their skin was crusty and dry. The men's huts leaned wearily, one against the other, and the odor of okra and pork sunk deep into the cracks and crevices, the dusty bedclothes, the timber and soul of the huts themselves.

This was the town and its people. And each hut was one room with a creaky bed, a bureau, an ancient sink, stove-grimy pinups of movie stars, calendars, saints. And there were children with rickets, birth-dirty; tired women with tongueless eyes; forsaken men who sat listless and unwondering.

Tiny hovel heaps; these houses crowded one upon the other beside the dusty dirt road; backward and age-spent, this town only fifty miles from glittering Daytona, tourists and neon hotels. Only once or twice, now and then, did a visitor arrive, startling the town, walking gingerly from a shining auto up to a ramshackle step or porch.

Only itinerant salesmen, gaudy with false amiability, flashing a "Brother, I'm your friend" smile. And it was impolite to offend, a sacrilege not to please, and so they nodded, the dusty men, the unwondering women, they nodded and signed, paid down payments on appliances, insurance policies, gadgets that they knew would somehow never arrive.

And the children stood and stared long after the stranger had

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passed from sight. Reverently they watched even the cloud of dust that enclosed the miraculous machine, but they were silent for they knew no words to express their wonder, and their elders had never known.

But they knew he was no salesman, that very night that the shining black limousine pulled up way out at the edge of town. It stopped a moment, a night-black beetle. The lights flashed on. Three men sprang out, wire-thin, supple as weeds.

They stood silently for a moment in the darkness, and then with the headlights glimmering they moved quickly, delicately as insects, back and forth from car to field. Ropes writhed in dirt and stone, hammers pounded, and a weary monstrosity of canvas settled down with heaves and groans.

And in the morning the tent waited; waited to be filled with the earth-weary, time-worn women; the ricket-ridden, lost-eyed children; the men who sat sullenly in the black-mouthed doorways. And so they knew, the people, as they squatted on mattresses littered with refuse, they knew when they saw the flapping canvas pyramid that this was no ordinary salesman with whom they had to deal.

They wondered what he wanted, here in the weary, scrubby-poor town, with his limousine and his tent, his curving-smile mouth and spinach-green eyes. They wondered what he wanted, he and the two men that followed and watched and listened closely when he spoke.

And Brother Michael smiled and picked his teeth. He daubed perfume on his frayed coat lapel and gazed with hopeful speculation at the distance between the tent and town. He had parked not too close, and yet not too far away, and this involved a subtle psychological distinction, in that his very position made him part, and yet not part, and was a token of welcome but not familiarity.

And if his suit was store-bought, somewhat elegant, still it claimed a slight, calculated shabbiness about the lapel, and each morning with infinite caution Brother Michael dusted his shiny black oxfords with a film of dust. And his manner? That, too, was a study in subtle variations, each calculated to give a definite effect. It was dignified, definitely the bearing of a leader, and yet touched with a hint of humility and even, when the occasion warranted, self-depreciation.

He was tall and dark, a considerable asset, rather stockily built, and his carefully waved black hair fell in a practiced tumble over his wide forehead. The spinach-green eyes beneath could smile with disarming frankness, or in an instant glow with the fire of diabolical inspiration.

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In fact, from the waist up, Brother Michael was altogether pleased with his appearance. It was only the legs, undeniably long and regrettably knock-kneed, that caused him undue concern. It looked, on initial examination, as if God had intended the self-styled Brother to be all legs, and only at the last moment fashioned the rest of the torso with the material still left unused.

So early that morning Brother Michael sent his two Brothers of the Inner Temple to meet and size up the population of the town. Only then did he extract a portable icebox from his car, a bottle from his small black bag, and sitting back, enjoy all by himself the cooling draughts of rye on the rocks.

He picked his teeth, unconsciously shoved the deep wave on his forehead into place, and surveyed with satisfaction the scene his eyes devoured. For it was the beginning of the orange season, the most auspicious time. The smell of pork was strong and empty pop bottles littered door jambs and window sills.

It was easy to tell about these small Florida towns, even before the tent was erected and the first testimony made in the name of the Lord. It was a simple method. When there were pop bottles the season was good and people had money; when it was bad the people drank water.

Brother Michael sighed, finished off his drink, and entered the tent through the back flap. The dankness inside pushed at his neck and shoulders and his nostrils quivered at the heavy scent of bodies that had hidden in the folds. Someday he would have a church. Then at least the odor of one congregation could escape through open windows before the next arrived.

Still there was work to be done, and he unsnapped a small section of canvas that opened only peephole size, and taking out a pair of binoculars, he stared with glittering eyes toward the town.

Brother Larry was just approaching the first hut. He was also tall, but very lean, with a youthful white face and wilted corn-silk hair. He knocked on the door, then turned and stared with studied abstraction at the street about him. When he finally looked up to see a thin, straight-mouthed woman standing before him, Brother Larry seemed at first to be taken by surprise, as if it were the last thing he could think of, to be standing there and caught off guard.

"Oh," he said, stammering, and his long arms made a helpless gesture at his sides. Good, Brother Michael thought, watching. But still a trifle too self-conscious, too mute. He'd told Larry a million times that the arms shouldn't just *dangle,* they should *speak*. They should convey, in one gesture,

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your overwhelming sorrow at the necessity of disturbing the good woman of the house.

Still, youthful earnestness was conveyed by each muscle of Larry's body. It bent forward almost in half at the waist, and the hands, sprouting out at the end of the narrow arms, seemed to beg for admittance.

Brother Michael grinned with satisfaction. The woman was smiling hesitantly. Larry took a step backward, stumbled, and whoosh, he was inside. That step backward always took them off guard. They opened the door in sudden alarm, and all at once you were in. It was the best possible technique, and Brother Michael laughed. He'd sold a lot of encyclopedias that way.

He put the binoculars away, not needing them to know what was going on inside. Brother Larry would stubbornly refuse the offer of the one available chair as if acknowledging that he was unworthy of such fine attention. Instead, shoving his unruly hair backward with a boyish gesture, he would suddenly plop down on the floor, ignore the dirt and litter and smile disarmingly at the grimy, astonished children.

"Boy, it's just good to sit down," and then, "I hate to bother you-all, but could I have a glass of wata?" —and all in perfect southern accent, though Brother Larry was born and raised in Northern Ohio.

And the battle was won. This small gesture, this insignificant request immediately put the woman at ease, and more, it seemed to indebt Brother Larry to her own hospitality. And Larry, when he had drunk deeply, would smile.

"Matter of fact," he'd say, "I'm here with Brother Michael," and he would lower his voice and bow his head. "But I was just so thirsty" (frank, now) "that I just had to get in outa that ole heat.

"What? Well, I really shouldn't be telling you this, but since you-all been so nice to me and all—well, Brother Michael, he received a message from God for all the poor folk.

"I know just what you mean, it was hard for me to believe at first. But once I heard! Oh, Sister, the spirit of God is sweet, and He gave me forgiveness and healed my soul.

"Yes, matter a fact, he will be at the tent. I shouldn't be telling you this, but he might, he just very well might receive a vision from God this very night! I'd better be gitting on, now. Remember, though, don't you tell anyone now.

"But just imagine, Brother Michael can tell the poor how to get rich, and not just spirit-wise either, but rich in good hard cash.

"Well, thank you again Miss . . . Oh, it's Mrs. I sure am sorry. I just naturally thought them young boys was your brothers. Well goodby, Sister. The Lord be with you."

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Brother Michael waited and finally picked up the binoculars. Larry had had plenty of time to give the pitch and be back by now. Then he scowled. Larry was half way to the tent; he was whistling, and a cigarette dangled from his thin lips. He looked toward Brother Michael and waved jauntily, and Mike cursed. A million times, a million times he'd told that damn fool to preserve that boyish routine until he was safely inside. Lord almighty, even suckers had eyes. It didn't pay to underestimate them.

Still Larry had done well and soon the town would be buzzing with the legend ready-made of Brother Michael's holiness and the message he had received from God. He motioned to John and Larry and ducked inside the tent. Nobody would get a glimpse of him until the proper time, and by then Sue would have time to do her stuff.

"*Sister* Sue," John said, laughing.

Brother Michael picked his teeth. "She'd better remember to take off her rouge and nail polish this time," he warned.

John colored; his wide rabbit face wrinkled and screwed itself up in anxious puckers. He was fat but neat, kindly and obedient as a pet. Now, though, his face darkened, and his wide, light eyes looked peeved.

"Aw, she's all right, Mike. She only forgot once. There ain't nobody that can work 'em up like Sue."

Mike smiled suddenly, forgivingly, and patted John on the shoulder. "OK. Just check her over first to make sure."

They sat, the three of them in the late afternoon, way out behind the tent where no one could see. Larry went out to the car to get smokes, and when he returned his eyes were worried.

"Mike, some jerk's coming up the road the other way." He stopped for breath and took a swig of rye. "Looks like a cut-in. He's all dressed in robes."

Mike looked up quickly. "Better'n mine?"

"Yeah."

Mike thought a moment, then sent John to the trunk. "My best black suit," he ordered. "No use trying to overawe him with robes, then." And to Larry, "Look like he's got dough?"

Larry put his glass down, looking bewildered. Direct questioning always made him sweat.

"Well?"

"Material of his robes looked good, what I could see." Larry wrinkled his forehead and started chewing on a piece of grass. "Seems like he'd be riding if he had dough."

But John was back, and quickly Mike put on the elegantly plain black suit and white tunic. With one hand he smoothed down the

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wave in his hair, and with the other he pressed his eyelids shut. The two other men, also changing, were reverently silent. Finally Brother Michael opened his eyes. Gone was the irresolution and indecision. Calm, powerful, assured, the black eyes stared outward with divine benevolence.

The bottles were shoved in a hastily dug hole, the cigarette stubs hidden, and the three men advanced side by side to the front of the tent. Brother Michael wore his plain suit as if it were a bishop's robe. Serene dignity radiated outward from his being, and yet his bowed head proclaimed his humility, his awareness that he was but a lowly emissary of the Lord.

Nevertheless his eyes, beneath the half-closed lids, were restless. He tilted his head backward, lifted it up in an attitude of prayer, and through his slit lids surveyed from head to toe the stranger who was almost upon them. And he didn't like it one bit. Even before the other spoke, Mike knew he had been in business a long time. His makeup was flawless. His composure and stance gave the appearance of frightening authenticity, and for a moment Brother Michael felt a touch of undeniable fear.

Suppose, suppose, he thought, this man was actually a man of God. Often he'd had nightmares in which he met, for the first time, a sincere priest or minister, an authentic preacher who would, at one glance, strip away his own hypocrisy and studied holiness. In his particular line of business this was admittedly unlikely, but now cold sweat beaded his folded palms.

But then he pulled himself together. What real man of God could afford robes like this boy was wearing? No bona fide preacher was that well off. With startling rapidity his mind searched for a way to cut himself in, and he wondered, at the same time, what this joker was doing way out here if he had a good racket of his own.

The men came together cautiously. Brother Michael opened his eyes halfway, folded his hands again, and took a step forward.

"Good afternoon, Brother, welcome in the name of the Lord."

The stranger bowed, inclined his head toward Brother Michael and ignored Brothers Larry and John who stood uneasily, scowling beneath sanctimonious smiles.

"Blessings in the name of the Lord."

Brother Michael groaned inwardly. This boy must really have a good gimmick, he thought. The white gown was spotless, even the hem was untouched by the dust of the road. Showmanship like that came high. He let his face shine in an expansive smile of welcome.

"Did you wish to speak to me, Brother, concerning the business of the Lord?"

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The stranger's full, fleshy lips moved only slightly, and his hollow eyes glimmered beneath heavy white brows. He looked, Mike thought, like an Inquisition monk, every line of his face set in disapproving, severe lines, an alien to humor.

"Could we speak privately, without the aid of your two blessed assistants in the Lord? In all humility," he said, "the business I have in mind is of the most private nature and secrecy is essential."

Brother Michael smiled, resisting an impulse to tell the stranger to go to hell. The other's college English annoyed him, and more than that, there was his studied appearance of legitimacy, and a sober, almost sinister fanaticism in his manner that made Brother Michael more uneasy than he would admit. But beneath this, there was something Mike couldn't put his finger on—something terrifyingly familiar in the other's appearance, and he felt that the stranger was watching him so closely that it almost seemed he was picking up some significant clues from Mike's own mind.

Still, he looked well-heeled, and Mike tilted his head, closed his eyes and considered. Then, nodding gently, he held up one hand to the others as if in blessing. The gesture meant, stick around and listen outside.

Brothers Larry and John returned the gesture, bowed slightly, and walked slowly and with dignity toward the town. They would circle and return. Brother Michael smiled.

"You don't believe in the second immersion?" he asked, his eyes narrowing at the other's reply. It was a loaded question and the stranger had given the wrong answer, at least for the South. Suddenly Mike felt more relaxed. Obviously the other had no connections down here. There wasn't anything to worry about.

So he spread his legs apart more comfortably and leaned backward. "What did you have in mind, Brother?" But the expression on the stranger's face did not soften or relax at Mike's easier tone, and the pasty white skin retained its loose, solemn folds. Mike's face hardened for a moment before he let his wide black eyes recapture their silent fervor.

"Surely," he probed, "you didn't travel here merely to make the acquaintance of a poor brother in the Lord?" And the other's attention snapped taut. His lips opened in a silent, humorless smile that broadened the heavy triangle of his nose.

"I am interested in bringing more souls to the true light." He eyed Brother Michael severely and Mike rocked back slightly on his heels.

"Of course, of course, Brother, aren't we all? We all try our best,"

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he muttered, glancing off in the distance to show that the time of business was at hand.

"I'll come to the point, then. I've worked up a new method of conversion that I should like to try."

Brother Michael let a tinge of youthful bewilderment touch his eyes. "A new method?" he asked. "Surely the old, proven ways are best." And as he spoke, something inside Mike turned over. Something warned him to say no. Without finding out what it was, or what was in it for him. To refuse quickly so that he would not be tempted. The man repelled him, yet he still felt drawn by that indefinable sense of familiarity.

He made up his mind and his face was a study in gratitude and regret. "I'm terribly sorry, terribly. But even in the Brotherhood of the Lord we have our weaknesses, and I admit that in the matter of conversion I am somewhat old-fashioned." He brushed back a lock of hair and let his hands dangle helplessly at his sides.

"To tell the truth, I'm flattered, flattered that you should like to work here, but after all"—he lowered his voice—"who are we to dabble with the tried methods of conversion?"

The stranger watched Brother Michael intently as he listened, then bowed his head. "We all obey the will of the Lord," he replied sonorously. "Still, my parishioners are well blessed with material possessions, and I am prepared to offer five hundred dollars for the privilege of experimenting this evening."

$500 . . . Mike shook his head and picked his teeth. For that much money he could like anyone. He leaned forward cautiously. "A thousand."

The stranger smiled sorrowfully. "I'm afraid that my offer must stand. Surely a humble follower of the Lord does not require more." Mike smiled. He wondered if the stranger knew that he would never have touched the deal if he had gone all the way on price. A deal for a thousand would have a catch in it somewhere.

But he felt uncomfortable under the other's scrutiny again and looked up. "What do you want me to do?"

Even then there was no hint of eagerness in the stranger's face. "Hardly anything," he said. "When you have prepared the people for their . . . their . . ."

"Testimonials," Mike said, lifting his eyebrow.

"Yes. When you have prepared them, merely end up with the words, '*The Lord is a great white bird.*' I'll take over from there."

Brother Michael smiled and coughed politely, and the other man withdrew two hundred-dollar bills from his gown. "The rest after the ceremony," he said, not looking at the money, acting as if it were not there at all. . . .

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The people's faces that night were apathetic, passive, yet something within them waited to be kindled. Sister Sue, in a long, dark dress, stood swaying before them, her black hair flowing and her dark eyes shining from a pale white face.

"Glory, glory, glory to the Lord,
Glory, glory, glory to the Lord,
Glory, glory, glory to the good Lord Jesus.
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!
Down you sinners,
Hide your heads, weep with shame,
Wash your hearts with the blood of the Lamb,
Blood of the Lamb, Blood of the Lamb,
Blood of the Good Lord, Jesus. . . ."

And the weary-eyed women and the hungry, lean men beat their breasts and sobbed, and lowered their heads and listened to the voice of the messenger of God. Sister Sue motioned to Brother Michael that her job was done, the people were prepared and waiting and suddenly she stopped yelling and the heads raised and Brother Michael stood before them.

His face was contorted with sorrow and his voice so soft that every ear strained to hear his words.

"Oh sinners, sinners! Oh, sinners, how you have wounded the Good Lord Jesus. How you have sinned against Him, thrust a million nails into His still burning flesh.

"Adulterers, hypocrites," his voice boomed, "do you think He knows you not? He knows well that you sin in private and in darkness and behind closed doors. His vengeance seeks you out. In very truth His justice should cut you down, here and now, while you think yourselves hidden in the multitude.

"But the Lord, ah, the Lord is merciful. He . . . He . . . *Wait!* Wait. I hear Him! I hear the Lord! He's near, very near. Feel His wings hover about you. He's here, I tell you, here!"

The crowd shivered, trembled, their eyes glued to the figure before them. And suddenly Brother Michael screamed, covered his face with his robe. "Oh Jesus, Master, speak to me!" He was on his knees, collapsed before the Lord, and Brother John, on cue, began to speak in tongues.

"Forgive me, oh Lord," someone wailed, and the women began to yell.

"Oh, Lord, Lord." Brother Michael screamed and everyone waited in ecstasy. "Oh the Lord is like a great white bird, His wings beateth me down," and suddenly, between Brother Michael and the congregation stood a third figure, the figure of the stranger. And Mike grew cold. What was it, *what,* and he racked his brain.

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What was it that made the stranger's appearance so terribly familiar? But he stopped thinking as the voice ripped through the tent:

"FOLLOW ME, FOLLOW ME INTO THE VERY STRONGHOLD OF THE LORD. FOLLOW ME INTO HIS TEMPLE. THE LORD HAS SPOKEN. FOLLOW ME, OH YE SINNERS, INTO THE HEART OF THE MERCIFUL LORD."

And his voice was no voice Mike had ever heard before, and his face was no face that had ever looked upon the earth before. And Brother Michael covered up his head and followed, sobbing, rushing blindly with the others, and the weight of his own guilt dragged down upon him.

The temple rose, shimmering, outside in the darkness, and rays of love radiated outward from its glowing interior. Even then, even then Mike was vaguely aware that nothing had been in that spot before, only brown grasses and insects, scrubby stumps of trees.

He stumbled, fell. Waves of exultation drove him onward until the goal was almost in sight. "Wait, wait," he called to the others, tripping over his white gown, but they rushed on and passed him by.

But what was he doing? What? "Stop, stop," a voice within him cried, but stumbling, his body still rushed on. "Stop, stop," the voice called, and brought his legs to a sudden halt. "Pull yourself together," he screamed, and bit his arm till the blood came and his temples pounded.

"Don't fall for it. It's a gimmick," he ordered, and he closed his mind and eyes from the shimmering temple and his heart from the waves of love. Immediately a chasm of loneliness opened up inside his mind, a feeling of banishment, the sudden knowledge that all his quests would be in vain. He shook his head, sobbing, suddenly knowing this to be the final trick of the charlatan, calculated to drive him crazy, to send him running to the temple. To the temple that was not a temple.

Sweat iced his palms. Resolutely he blanked his mind, and suddenly everything swept into focus. He saw the people, whose reason he had helped destroy. He saw them dash past, and with horrible clarity he glimpsed for the last time the stranger's face before it disappeared inside.

And he knew, when he saw the face, why the man had seemed familiar. Why the stranger had watched him so closely when he talked. Because the figure of the charlatan was composed down to the last detail from the image of Mike as he had always wanted to be. The white hair instead of black—the broad cheekbones—the straight legs, the built-in appearance of authenticity.

"God," Mike yelled and he meant it. The man—was it a man?—had formed himself accord-

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ing to the picture already existing in his own mind. Why? What was he, really? And Mike looked up to the temple. Not a temple, but a ship. And a ship that earth would not know for years to come.

Mike started forward but Larry went running by, and Mike lunged out, grabbed him. "Let me go, let me go," Larry yelled, and Mike gave him a right to the jaw and sat, panting, holding him down.

But he caught a new movement out of the corner of his eye, and he knocked Larry out and left him lying on the ground. The ship was moving! The people! Where was that bastard taking the people? He groaned and started running. He had betrayed his own kind to a . . . a pied piper from some other where. He was the judas goat—the judas *man*. . . .

He got closer and as he did the ship started spinning. It sent him reeling to the ground.

The night was deathly quiet. The moon shone on the flapping canvas pyramid, the empty pop bottles, the crowded huts. Mike walked over to Larry and helped him up. They stood together staring at the silence. Mike reached into the pocket of his gown. Inside he felt the extra bills, and he knew how much was there.

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I LOVED ICE cream—all kinds, except chocolate. Chocolate I didn't care for. This upset my mother and father, threw Good Humor men into a Bad Humor, and caused my normal, chocolate-loving friends to suffer great embarrassment. It was considered either a cheap play for notoriety on my part or an appalling, though perhaps harmless, aberration. I hope my readers will take the latter view when I confess that I love the works of George Orwell—all kinds, except *1984*. I have read the book three times and come away each time with a distinct feeling of hopeless desperation. For I can find little basis in it for the popular and critical hosannas it has received. As a reverse-Utopia s.f. yarn, *1984* is excellent; but, it honestly seems to me, no better than similar stories by Heinlein and other masters of the genre of whose very existence the critics are blissfully ignorant. As a profound social document, a Warning to Sleepers, it hardly compares with the piercing and non-satirical DARKNESS AT NOON, and, millions to the contrary, is not in the same league with Swift's many literary indictments. David Karp's ONE may be imitative, as some hold, but at least it is a novel and not a hortatory, top-of-the-voice tract.

The motion picture version of *1984* (Columbia release) is as faithful to the original as any but purists could ask. The screen-writers were faced with the same prodigious problem that faced Ray Bradbury in his adaptation of MOBY DICK. To touch upon all, or even most of Melville's important philosophical points would have been impossible, not to say inadvisable: Bradbury wisely distilled the Message and mixed it with the equally important *story*. The resulting screenplay could not be much improved. The same is true of *1984*. Orwell's dread of creeping totalitarianism is implicit; however, Winston Smith performs a sufficient number of non-vital actions, and utters a sufficient number of non-oratorical speeches, to suggest that he is a human being. ("Man be my metaphor!" cried Dylan Thomas, but Orwell took the capital M to heart.) In the central role, Edmund O'Brien does his usual splendid job: it is clear that he gave thought to the characterization. Less impressive, for no tangible reason, is Jan Sterling as the

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girl. Michael Redgrave showers us with subdued histrionics, but his interpretation of O'Brien is grievously wrong. At no time do we believe, as we certainly should, that perhaps O'Brien *is* a member of the Underground, that he *will* help Smith. The betrayal, therefore, is not the crashing, final blow that it was intended to be.

1984 is a sincere attempt at a good movie; it reaches a high level of intelligence and taste and imagination; it hews fanatically to the book; yet it leaves one cold and undisturbed. And the fault, I think, is not with the film makers but rather with Orwell.

The "flip side" to *1984*, THE GAMMA PEOPLE (Warwick-Columbia) is far more interesting. Here is the most unusual picture of the year, maybe of the decade: for many reasons, cardinal among them the fact that it is the first science fiction operetta ever produced. It has all the trappings of an operetta, at any rate, with the single exception of a score. The "plot" has vaguely to do with the accidental visit of an American newspaperman (Paul Douglas) and an English photographer (Leslie Phillips) to a tiny mythical country located somewhere in the Alps. They were on their way to Edinburgh, to cover the music festival (which is like sending Laurel and Hardy to a mathematicians' convention) but their railroad car disengaged itself from the train and went wild. The country itself is not on any map; even worse, it is in the grip of (again) totalitarianism, Iron Curtain style, and headed—for no logical purpose—by a mad scientist (Walter Rilla). This scientist, having nothing better to do, has been experimenting with a gamma-ray whatzit whose function is to change ordinary human beings into geniuses. Mostly it makes brainless goons out of its victims, but even when it works, there's hell to pay—for the geniuses are more unsavory than the goons. (Listed as goons in the credits, by the way: Goon Number One, Goon Number Two, etc.) Well, Americans being what they are, Paul Douglas sets out to put things right. In company with the photographer—who could be none other than Freddie Widgeon, a crumpet of Wodehouse's Drones' Club—and several comely females, he undergoes travail and torment on his Mercy Mission. A bomb blows up his car, he is shot at, slapped, attacked by predatory goons and roasted by a gamma-ray. Yet he is victorious, and, with the demise of the mad scientist, the little country is set free.

The libretto to this curiosity is by John Gilling and John Gossage, a fun-loving pair directly descended from da Ponte. Original story by Lou Pollock, who has traveled a strange road from his hilarious STORK BITES MAN.

No fun at all is THE BEAST OF

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HOLLOW MOUNTAIN (Nassour-UA). Like so many third-rate "s.f.-scare" pictures, it takes itself with deadly seriousness from beginning to end, as if daring the audience to question its logic. And like the others, it is a bouillabaisse of interminable exposition, dull situations, unholy dialogue, poor acting and decent special effects. The credits are warning enough: "Screenplay by Robert Hill, Additional Dialogue by Jack DeWitt, From an Idea by Willis O'Brien . . ."

As for the story, it romps aimlessly along, without so much as a bow toward credibility. There are lacunae big enough for a tyrannosaurus rex to walk through, and one does—but only after most of the film is over. There is some excitement here, though not much. The rest is all about Guy Madison's problems in succeeding as a rancher in Mexico. If this question intrigues you, go and see THE BEAST OF HOLLOW MOUNTAIN; otherwise, don't.

A Hollywood Trade (one of the two daily newspapers which are both Bible and Who's Who to the industry) refers to THE SHE CREATURE (Golden State-American International) as "an exploitation bet." If by this it is meant that the public is being exploited, I wholly agree. It would be difficult to imagine a show more simple-minded and pedestrian, one quite so lacking in originality.

Yet, to quote further from the Trade, ". . . you can't argue with the customers." And the customers flocked like sailors into port to see this atrocity: one Los Angeles drive-in was filled before three P.M., and the rest of the theaters did fine, brisk business. Why? Not for the appeal of the stars. Chester Morris, though capable, is a relic of the near past; Tom Conway never carved a career comparable with that of George Sanders, his brother; Cathy Downs and Lance Fuller are not magnetic names. And apart from her distinction as almost-queen of the San Diego S.F. Convention of some years back (she was called to Hollywood at the last moment), Marla English has little to offer the public except an extraordinarily well-sculptured, if somewhat off-balance, frame, and a face made fascinating by its vast and total paucity of expression.

The story (by Lou Rusoff) could not account for the cheery B.O. either, for it is simply a tattered postscript to the Bridey Murphy papers. Chester Morris, a sideshow faker, makes a deal with millionaire Tom Conway to cash in on the hypnotism and regression craze; Morris discovers he really does have supermortal powers and brings into being a "she-creature." This creature makes Marla its unwilling tool and winds up killing practically everybody.

The direction is static, the camera work uninspired, the dialogue

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on a literary level under used-car advertisements—but, like they say, you can't argue with the customers.

In CURUCU, BEAST OF THE AMAZON (U-I), Curt Siodmak is at last given a free hand. Loosed from the toils of studio intrigue, working alone in far Brazil, he has finally made a picture of which he can say, "This is mine!" I'm glad it's his, too, for had this incredibly stupid film come from anyone else, I should have been downright shocked.

It is about a Brazilian monster which is supposed to come up from the dreaded Curucu Falls periodically for the purpose of killing human beings. Actually it isn't a monster at all, but a native chief, who wants his people to return to the ways of their ancestors. Chiefie uses what he, in his bottomless naïveté, considers a frightful disguise. It is rainbow-colored, feathered and scaled, and would make a handsome centerpiece for some holiday table. But, because King Curt so decrees, this circus suit *does* scare the natives off the new plantations and back to their unsanitary villages. And it takes plantation foreman John Bromfield, in company with woman doctor Beverly Garland, to expose the whole nasty business.

To give you an idea of the manner in which this "horror-suspense" yarn is treated, the Monster makes a full appearance—in broad daylight—at the very beginning of the film.

It all goes to show that governments should stop being so damn cooperative about the use of their countries for films. . . .

Of IT CONQUERED THE WORLD (Sunset-American International) there is not much to say, which does not deter me from saying plenty. The same Lou Rusoff has written an atrocious screenplay about the landing on Earth of a Venusian who is annoyed with our attempts to produce an artificial satellite—so annoyed, in fact, that he, or it, decides to take over. The Venusian carries with him all the menace of an elderly dachshund, and the various heroes carry on an unending game of "Brains, brains, who's got the brains?"

As an excellent cure for insomnia, I recommend THE MOLE PEOPLE (U-I). Here is a picture that moves its story along with all the speed of a digestive tract, with similar results. Laszlo Gorog (which, spelled backwards, is Gorog) has written a turgid drama of an underground civilization, and the adventures of three archeologists therein. The archeologists do not *discover* the world beneath the Earth (that would have taken tedious plotting)—they fall into it by accident. Once there, they find themselves regarded as minor gods, owing to their possession of "The Stick of Fire." For a long time, the story, and the protagonists'

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lives, depend entirely upon whether or not this "Stick of Fire" (an Eveready flashlight) will operate.

Eventually it fails, and we have lots of running around. John Agar and Hugh Beaumont escape this remnant of a supposedly lost Sumerian civilization by making friends with the mole people—poor dumb monsters who work for the underground rulers. The creatures revolt, there is an earthquake, and everything falls apart.

It is all quite absurd, and Dr. Frank Baxter—who spends ten introductory minutes trying to convince us that it isn't absurd—should stick to Shakespeare.

This season, for the first time in theatrical history, science fiction promises to play an important part on the stage, with three plays already produced or in production and others rumored. Obviously F&SF needs a reviewer on Broadway as well as in Hollywood; and equally obviously that reviewer should be William Morrison, who is both an accomplished creator of science fiction, as F&SF readers well know, and a professional writer on the theater. Under his real name of Joseph Samachson, he is the author (in collaboration with his wife Dorothy) of LET'S MEET THE THEATRE *and* THE DRAMATIC STORY OF THE THEATRE. *(He is also a Ph.D. in chemistry in charge of a cancer research group and when is someone going to start research on multiple personality in the creative arts?) Mr. Morrison's column will appear here as often as productions necessitate, and as promptly as magazine schedules permit, so that you may plan your science fiction viewing on your next New York trip.*

The Science Stage

by WILLIAM MORRISON

FANTASY HAS BEEN PART OF THE theater since the days of primitive man, who first invented gods and devils. The gods had their greatest glory onstage in ancient Egypt and Greece. The Devil took a longer

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time to start connecting with the ball, but he had a high batting average in the Middle Ages, and is now smashing homers on Broadway in DAMN YANKEES. The kind of fantasy you see in DAMN YANKEES is wish-fulfilment—ordinary guy gets beautiful girl and becomes great hero—and as wishes will always be with us, you can be sure that this kind of fantasy will never die.

So far, it's been different with science fiction. And to take a particular example, it's different with Arch Oboler's NIGHT OF THE AUK, which I hope doesn't fulfill anybody's wishes, and has by this time, I am afraid, joined in oblivion the extinct bird which lent it part of its title.

It's a pity, in a way. NIGHT OF THE AUK, presented at the Playhouse on December 3, is not a great play, nor even a good one, but on the other hand it is not quite the play lousy that a quick demise on Broadway indicates to the initiated. On opening night it usually becomes evident to the producer that he has either a smash or a flop. Nowadays, the Broadway plays that fall in between are rarer than such other inbetweens as hermaphrodites. Kermit Bloomgarden, who has lately enjoyed the sweet smell of success with THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, THE MOST HAPPY FELLA, and A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE, needed to be no esper to detect the rank odor of failure surrounding NIGHT OF THE AUK, and had no choice but to kill the play quickly.

It had its virtues, first of all the setting by Howard Bay. To those of us who have seen s.f. sets chiefly on TV, which reserves most of its energy and talent for commercials, the fine job that Bay did was striking. He had to portray the interior of a spaceship returning from the first successful visit to the moon, and he did it beautifully. Whether the setting was realistic I am in no position to say. But lighting, sound effects, and the weird instrumentation of the future combined with a sloping stage which had several levels of action to make you think you were looking into an actual spaceship. At least I did, until the play itself got in the way.

Virtue number two, which is inseparably linked with all the defects of the play, lay in the author's intentions. Oboler aimed for the moon figuratively, as his characters did literally. This was to be no mere space opera but a grim warning to humanity, and it didn't need the dedication to Norman Cousins to make *that* clear. Like WINGS OVER EUROPE, which warned of the danger of a weapon like the atomic bomb before one existed, or R.U.R., which introduced the word *robot* into the language, NIGHT OF THE AUK told humanity that it was heading for destruction. The message wasn't exactly novel, however, and Oboler knew it. How then, make it so striking, so effective,

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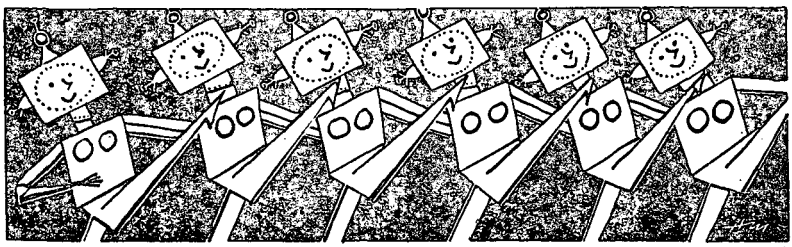
that no one could shrug it off?

For answer, Oboler showed the kind of courage that most playwrights would rather admire than imitate, and turned to what was intended to be poetic prose. Even allowing for the tensions involved in being cooped up together in a spaceship, his five characters are an unstable group; two are fairly neurotic, one is a psychopath, and one is pretty close to that, and I have wondered whether the lines they had to speak made them that way. Not that the dialogue is all bad. Enough of it is, however, for the good or even passable sections to be lost in the shuffle.

Moreover, even for neurotics, the behavior of the characters doesn't make too much sense. Apparently the trip out from Earth is so full of sweetness and moonlight that they don't get to know each other. Only after the leader of the expedition leaves a man to die on the radioactive surface of our satellite does the squabbling break out. And then, the very success of the expedition apparently touches off a world war, destroying earth completely.

It's grim indeed, and ironic and philosophical, and the actors have a tough time with it. Claude Rains, as the old scientist whose own suffering has taught him wisdom, doesn't seem very smart, but does his professionally expert damnedest. So do Christopher Plummer, as the psychopathic leader of the expedition, and the others, but the script throws them. In addition, Mr. Plummer takes an effective beating onstage, but I'm afraid that even this sacrifice for the cause of the art doesn't make the play believable.

As I said, it's a pity. Science fiction doesn't get many times at bat on Broadway these days, and I don't like to see it take a called third strike. There is reason to hope, however, that the next time round it will do better. Gore Vidal's VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET will be opening soon, and this has already run the TV gauntlet and come out alive and kicking. I'm hoping that the injection of hormones needed to make it develop into a full-length play will make it better than ever.



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The earnest critics who accuse science fiction writers of paranoia have this fact on their side: We do seem to agree with the paranoid that there are Conspiracies all about us, lurking behind commonplace facades and shaping our ends by devious and unperceived means. It is this classic theme that Mr. Matheson here explores, pitting his venturesome young hero against a hitherto unsuspected Conspiracy that affects every day of our lives . . . and proving joyously that a Conspiracy is not necessarily malevolent.

The Splendid Source

by RICHARD MATHESON

". . . Then spare me your slanders, and read this rather at night than in the daytime, and give it not to young maidens, if there be any . . . But I fear nothing for this book, since it is extracted from a high and splendid source, from which all that has issued has had a great success . . ."

—Balzac: *Contes Drolatiques*, Prologue

IT WAS THE ONE UNCLE LYMAN TOLD in the summer house that did it. Talbert was just coming up the path when he heard the punch line: "'My God!' cried the actress, 'I thought you said *sarsaparilla!*'"

Guffaws exploded in the little house. Talbert stood motionless, looking through the rose trellis at the laughing guests. Inside his contour sandals his toes flexed ruminatively. He thought.

Later he took a walk around Lake Bean and watched the crystal surf fold over and observed the gliding swans and stared at the goldfish and thought.

"I've been thinking," he said that night.

"*No,*" said Uncle Lyman, haplessly. He did not commit himself further. He waited for the blow.

Which fell.

"Dirty jokes," said Talbert Bean III.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Endless tides of them covering the nation."

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"I fail," said Uncle Lyman, "to grasp the point." Apprehension gripped his voice.

"I find the subject fraught with witchery," said Talbert.

"With—?"

"Consider," said Talbert. "Every day, all through our land, men tell off-color jokes; in bars and at ball games; in theatre lobbies and at places of business; on street corners and in locker rooms. At home and away, a veritable deluge of jokes."

Talbert paused meaningfully.

"Who makes them up?" he asked.

Uncle Lyman stared at his nephew with the look of a fisherman who has just hooked a sea serpent —half awe, half revulsion.

"I'm afraid—" he began.

"I want to know the source of these jokes," said Talbert. "Their genesis; their fountainhead."

"Why?" asked Uncle Lyman. Weakly.

"Because it is relevant," said Talbert. "Because these jokes are a part of a culture heretofore unplumbed. Because they are an anomaly; a phenomenon ubiquitous yet unknown."

Uncle Lyman did not speak. His pallid hands curled limply on his half-read *Wall Street Journal*. Behind the polished octagons of his glasses his eyes were suspended berries.

At last he sighed.

"And what part," he inquired, sadly, "am I to play in this quest?"

"We must begin," said Talbert, "with the joke you told in the summer house this afternoon. Where did you hear it?"

"Kulpritt," Uncle Lyman said. Andrew Kulpritt was one of the battery of lawyers employed by Bean Enterprises.

"Capital," said Talbert. "Call him up and ask him where *he* heard it."

Uncle Lyman drew the silver watch from his pocket.

"It's nearly midnight, Talbert," he announced.

Talbert waved away chronology. *"Now,"* he said. "This is important."

Uncle Lyman examined his nephew a moment longer. Then, with a capitulating sigh, he reached for one of Bean Mansion's thirty-five telephones.

Talbert stood toe-flexed on a bearskin rug while Uncle Lyman dialed, waited and spoke.

"Kulpritt?" said Uncle Lyman. "Lyman Bean. Sorry to wake you but Talbert wants to know where you heard the joke about the actress who thought the director said 'sarsaparilla.'"

Uncle Lyman listened. "I *said* —" he began again.

A minute later he cradled the receiver heavily.

"Prentiss," he said.

"Call him up," said Talbert.

"Talbert," Uncle Lyman asked.

"Now," said Talbert.

A long breath exuded between

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Uncle Lyman's lips. Carefully, he folded his *Wall Street Journal*. He reached across the mahogany table and tamped out his ten-inch cigar. Sliding a weary hand beneath his smoking jacket, he withdrew his tooled leather address book.

Prentiss heard it from George Sharper, C.P.A. Sharper heard it from Abner Ackerman, M.D. Ackerman heard it from William Cozener, Prune Products. Cozener heard it from Rod Tassel, Mgr., Cyprian Club. Tassel heard it from O. Winterbottom. Winterbottom heard it from H. Alberts. Alberts heard it from D. Silver, Silver from B. Phryne, Phryne from E. Kennelly.

By an odd twist Kennelly said he heard it from Uncle Lyman.

"There is complicity here," said Talbert. "These jokes are not self-generative."

It was four A.M. Uncle Lyman slumped, inert and dead-eyed, on his chair.

"There has to be a source," said Talbert.

Uncle Lyman remained motionless.

"*You're not interested,*" said Talbert, incredulously.

Uncle Lyman made a noise.

"I don't understand," said Talbert. "Here is a situation pregnant with divers fascinations. Is there a man or woman who has never heard an off-color joke? I say not. Yet, is there a man or woman who knows where these jokes come from? Again I say not."

Talbert strode forcefully to his place of musing at the twelve-foot fireplace. He poised there, staring in.

"I may be a millionaire," he said, "but I am sensitive." He turned. "And this phenomenon excites me."

Uncle Lyman attempted to sleep while retaining the face of a man awake.

"I have always had more money than I needed," said Talbert. "Capital investment was unnecessary. Thus I turned to investing the other asset my father left—my brain."

Uncle Lyman stirred; a thought shook loose.

"What ever happened," he asked, "to that society of yours, the S.P.C.S.P.C.A.?"

"Eh? The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? The past."

"And your interest in world problems. What about that sociological treatise you were writing—"

"*Slums: a Positive View,* you mean?" Talbert brushed it aside. "Inconsequence."

"And isn't there anything left of your political party, the Pro-anti-disestablishmentarianists?"

"Not a shred. Scuttled by reactionaries from within."

"What about Bimetallism?"

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"Oh, that!" Talbert smiled ruefully. "Passé, dear Uncle. I had been reading too many Victorian novels."

"Speaking of novels, what about your literary criticisms? Nothing doing with *The Use of the Semicolon in Jane Austen?* Or *Horatio Alger: the Misunderstood Satirist?* To say nothing of *Was Queen Elizabeth Shakespeare?"*

"Was Shakespeare Queen Elizabeth," corrected Talbert. "No, Uncle, nothing doing with them. They had momentary interest, nothing more . . ."

"I suppose the same holds true for *The Shoe Horn: Pro and Con,* eh? And those scientific articles—*Relativity Re-Examined* and *Is Evolution Enough?"*

"Dead and gone," said Talbert, patiently, "dead and gone. These projects needed me once. Now I go on to better things."

"Like who writes dirty jokes," said Uncle Lyman.

Talbert nodded. "Like that."

When the butler set the breakfast tray on the bed Talbert said, "Redfield, do you know any jokes?"

Redfield looked out impassively through the face an improvident nature had neglected to animate.

"Jokes, sir?" he inquired.

"You know," said Talbert. "Jollities."

Redfield stood by the bed like a corpse whose casket had been upended and removed.

"Well, sir," he said, a full thirty seconds later, "once, when I was a boy I heard one . . ."

"Yes?" said Talbert eagerly.

"I believe it went somewhat as follows," Redfield said. "When—uh—*When* is a portmanteau not a—"

"No, no," said Talbert, shaking his head, "I mean *dirty* jokes."

Redfield's eyebrows soared. The vernacular was like a fish in his face.

"You don't know any?" said a disappointed Talbert.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Redfield. "If I may make a suggestion. May I say that the chauffeur is more likely to—"

"You know any dirty jokes, Harrison?" Talbert asked through the tube as the Rolls Royce purred along Bean Road toward Highway 27.

Harrison looked blank for a moment. He glanced back at Talbert. Then a grin wrinkled his carnal jowls.

"Well, sir," he began, "there's this guy sittin' by the runway eatin' an onion, see?"

Talbert unclipped his four-color pencil.

Talbert stood in an elevator rising to the tenth floor of the Gault Building.

The hour ride to New York had been most illuminating. Not only had he transcribed seven of the most horrendously vulgar jokes he

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had ever heard in his life but had exacted a promise from Harrison to take him to the various establishments where these jokes had been heard.

The hunt was on.

MAX AXE/DETECTIVE AGENCY—read the words on the frosty-glassed door. Talbert turned the knob and went in.

Announced by the beautiful receptionist, Talbert was ushered into a sparsely furnished office on whose walls were a hunting license, a machine gun, and framed photographs of the Seagram factory, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in color and Herbert J. Philbrick who had led three lives.

Mr. Axe shook Talbert's hand.

"What could I do for ya?" he asked.

"First of all," said Talbert, "do you know any dirty jokes?"

Recovering, Mr. Axe told Talbert the one about the monkey and the elephant.

Talbert jotted it down. Then he hired the agency to investigate the men Uncle Lyman had phoned and uncover anything that was meaningful.

After he left the agency, Talbert began making the rounds with Harrison. He heard a joke the first place they went.

"There's this midget in a frankfurter suit, see?" it began.

It was a day of buoyant discovery. Talbert heard the joke about the cross-eyed plumber in the harem, the one about the preacher who won an eel at a raffle, the one about the fighter pilot who went down in flames and the one about the two Girl Scouts who lost their cookies in the laundromat.

Among others.

"I want," said Talbert, "one round-trip airplane ticket to San Francisco and a reservation at the Hotel Millard Filmore."

"May I ask," asked Uncle Lyman, "why?"

"While making the rounds with Harrison today," explained Talbert, "a salesman of ladies' undergarments told me that a veritable cornucopia of off-color jokes exists in the person of Harry Shuler, bellboy at the Millard Filmore. This salesman said that, during a three-day convention at that hotel, he had heard more new jokes from Shuler than he had heard in the first thirty-nine years of his life."

"And you are going to—?" Uncle Lyman began.

"Exactly," said Talbert. "We must follow where the spoor is strongest."

"Talbert," said Uncle Lyman, "Why do you *do* these things?"

"I am searching," said Talbert, simply.

"For what, dammit!" cried Uncle Lyman.

"For *meaning*," said Talbert.

Uncle Lyman covered his eyes. "You are the image of your mother," he declared.

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"Say nothing of her," charged Talbert. "She was the finest woman who ever trod the earth."

"Then how come she got trampled to death at the funeral of Rudolph Valentino?" Uncle Lyman charged back.

"That is a base canard," said Talbert, "and you know it. Mother just happened to be passing the church on her way to bringing food to the Orphans of the Dissolute Seamen—one of her many charities—when she was accidentally caught up in the waves of hysterical women and swept to her awful end."

A pregnant silence bellied the vast room. Talbert stood at a window looking down the hill at Lake Bean which his father had had poured in 1923.

"Think of it," he said after a moment's reflection. "The nation alive with off-color jokes—the *world* alive! And the same jokes, Uncle, *the same jokes.* How? *How?* By what strange means do these jokes o'erleap oceans, span continents? By what incredible machinery are these jokes promulgated over mountain and dale?"

He turned and met Uncle Lyman's mesmeric stare.

"I mean to know," he said.

At ten minutes before midnight Talbert boarded the plane for San Francisco and took a seat by the window. Fifteen minutes later the plane roared down the runway and nosed up into the black sky.

Talbert turned to the man beside him.

"Do you know any dirty jokes, sir?" he inquired, pencil poised.

The man stared at him. Talbert gulped.

"Oh, I *am* sorry," he said, "Reverend."

When they reached the room Talbert gave the bellboy a crisp five-dollar bill and asked to hear a joke.

Shuler told him the one about the man sitting by the runway eating an onion, see? Talbert listened, toes kneading inquisitively in his shoes. The joke concluded, he asked Shuler where this and similar jokes might be overheard. Shuler said at a wharf spot known as Davy Jones's Locker Room.

Early that evening, after drinking with one of the West Coast representatives of Bean Enterprises, Talbert took a taxi to Davy Jones's Locker Room. Entering its dim, smoke-fogged interior, he took a place at the bar, ordered a screwdriver and began to listen.

Within an hour's time he had written down the joke about the old maid who caught her nose in the bathtub faucet, the one about the three traveling salesmen and the farmer's ambidextrous daughter, the one about the nurse who thought they were Spanish olives and the one about the midget in the frankfurter suit. Talbert wrote this last joke under his original

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transcription of it, underlining changes in context attributable to regional influence.

At 10:16, a man who had just told Talbert the one about the hillbilly twins and their two-headed sister said that Tony, the bartender, was a virtual faucet of off-color jokes, limericks, anecdotes, epigrams and proverbs.

Talbert went over to the bar and asked Tony for the major source of his lewdiana. After reciting the limerick about the sex of the asteroid vermin, the bartender referred Talbert to a Mr. Frank Bruin, salesman, of Oakland, who happened not to be there that night.

Talbert, at once, retired to a telephone directory where he discovered five Frank Bruins in Oakland. Entering a booth with a coat pocket sagging change, Talbert began dialing them.

Two of the five Frank Bruins were salesmen. One of them, however, was in Alcatraz at the moment. Talbert traced the remaining Frank Bruin to Hogan's Alleys in Oakland where his wife said that, as usual on Thursday nights, her husband was bowling with the Moonlight Mattress Company All-Stars.

Quitting the bar, Talbert chartered a taxi and started across the bay to Oakland, toes in ferment.

Veni, vidi, vici?

Bruin was not a needle in a haystack.

The moment Talbert entered Hogan's Alleys his eye was caught by a football huddle of men encircling a portly, rosy-domed speaker. Approaching, Talbert was just in time to hear the punch line followed by an explosion of composite laughter. It was the punch line that intrigued.

"'My God!' cried the actress," Mr. Bruin had uttered, "'I thought you said a banana split!'"

This variation much excited Talbert who saw in it a verification of a new element—the interchangeable kicker.

When the group had broken up and drifted, Talbert accosted Mr. Bruin and, introducing himself, asked where Mr. Bruin had heard that joke.

"Why d'ya ask, boy?" asked Mr. Bruin.

"No reason," said the crafty Talbert.

"I don't remember where I heard it, boy," said Mr. Bruin finally. "Excuse me, will ya?"

Talbert trailed after him but received no satisfaction—unless it was in the most definite impression that Bruin was concealing something.

Later, riding back to the Millard Filmore, Talbert decided to put an Oakland detective agency on Mr. Bruin's trail to see what could be seen.

When Talbert reached the hotel there was a telegram waiting for him at the desk.

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MR. RODNEY TASSEL RECEIVED LONG DISTANCE CALL FROM MR. GEORGE BULLOCK, CARTHAGE HOTEL, CHICAGO. WAS TOLD JOKE ABOUT MIDGET IN SALAMI SUIT. MEANINGFUL? = AXE.

Talbert's eyes ignited.

"Tally," he murmured, *"ho."*

An hour later he had checked out of the Millard Filmore, taxied to the airport and caught a plane for Chicago.

Twenty minutes after he had left the hotel, a man in a dark pinstripe approached the desk clerk and asked for the room number of Talbert Bean III. When informed of Talbert's departure the man grew steely-eyed and immediately retired to a telephone booth. He emerged ashen.

"I'm sorry," said the desk clerk, "Mister Bullock checked out this morning."

"Oh." Talbert's shoulders sagged. All night on the plane he had been checking over his notes, hoping to discern a pattern to the jokes which would encompass type, area of genesis and periodicity. He was weary with fruitless concentration. Now this.

"And he left no forwarding address?" he asked.

"Only Chicago, sir," said the clerk.

"I see."

Following a bath and luncheon in his room, a slightly refreshed Talbert settled down with the telephone and the directory. There were 47 George Bullocks in Chicago. Talbert checked them off as he phoned.

At 3:00 o'clock he slumped over the receiver in a dead slumber. At 4:21, he regained consciousness and completed the remaining eleven calls. The Mr. Bullock in question was not at home, said his housekeeper, but was expected in that evening.

"Thank you kindly," said a bleary-eyed Talbert and, hanging up, thereupon collapsed on the bed—only to awake a few minutes past seven and dress quickly. Descending to the street, he gulped down a sandwich and a glass of milk, then hailed a cab and made the hour ride to the home of George Bullock.

The man himself answered the bell.

"Yes?" he asked.

Talbert introduced himself and said he had come to the Hotel Carthage earlier to see him.

"Why?" asked Mr. Bullock.

"So you could tell me where you heard that joke about the midget in the salami suit," said Talbert.

"Sir?"

"I said—"

"I heard what you said, sir," said Mr. Bullock, "though I cannot say that your remark makes any noticeable sense."

"I believe, sir," challenged Talbert, "that you are hiding behind fustian."

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"Behind fustian, sir?" retorted Bullock. "I'm afraid—"

"The game is up, sir!" declared Talbert in a ringing voice. "Why don't you admit it and tell me where you got that joke from?"

"I have not the remotest conception of what you're talking about, sir!" snapped Bullock, his words belied by the pallor of his face.

Talbert flashed a Mona Lisa smile. "Indeed?" he said.

And, turning lightly on his heel, he left Bullock trembling in the doorway. As he settled back against the taxicab seat again, he saw Bullock still standing there, staring at him. Then Bullock whirled and was gone.

"Hotel Carthage," said Talbert, satisfied with his bluff.

Riding back, he thought of Bullock's agitation and a thin smile tipped up the corners of his mouth. No doubt about it. The prey was being run to earth. Now if his surmise was valid there would likely be—

A lean man in a long raincoat was sitting on the bed when Talbert entered his room. The man's mustache, like a muddy toothbrush, twitched.

"Talbert Bean?" he asked.

Talbert bowed.

"The same," he said.

The man, a Colonel Bishop, retired, looked at Talbert with metal blue eyes.

"What is your game, sir?" he asked tautly.

"I don't understand," toyed Talbert.

"I think you do," said the Colonel, "and you are to come with me."

"Oh?" said Talbert.

He found himself looking down the barrel of a .45 calibre Webley-Fosbery.

"Shall we?" said the Colonel.

"But of course," said Talbert coolly. "I have not come all this way to resist now."

The ride in the private plane was a long one. The windows were blacked-out and Talbert hadn't the faintest idea in which direction they were flying. Neither the pilot nor the Colonel spoke, and Talbert's attempts at conversation were discouraged by a chilly silence. The Colonel's pistol, still leveled at Talbert's chest, never wavered, but it did not bother Talbert. He was exultant. All he could think was that his search was ending; he was, at last, approaching the headwaters of the dirty joke. After a time, his head nodded and he dozed—to dream of midgets in frankfurter suits and actresses who seemed obsessed by sarsaparilla or banana splits or sometimes both. How long he slept, and what boundaries he may have crossed, Talbert never knew. He was awakened by a swift loss of altitude and the steely voice of Colonel Bishop: "We are landing, Mr. Bean." The Colonel's grip tightened on the pistol.

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Talbert offered no resistance when his eyes were blindfolded. Feeling the Webley-Fosbery in the small of his back, he stumbled out of the plane and crunched over the ground of a well-kept airstrip. There was a nip in the air and he felt a bit lightheaded: Talbert suspected they had landed in a mountainous region; but what mountains, and on what continent, he could not guess. His ears and nose conveyed nothing of help to his churning mind.

He was shoved—none too gently—into an automobile, and then driven swiftly along what felt like a dirt road. The tires crackled over pebbles and twigs.

Suddenly the blindfold was removed. Talbert blinked and looked out the windows. It was a black and cloudy night; he could see nothing but the limited vista afforded by the headlights.

"You are well isolated," he said, appreciatively. Colonel Bishop remained tight-lipped and vigilant.

After a fifteen-minute ride along the dark road, the car pulled up in front of a tall, unlighted house. As the motor was cut Talbert could hear the pulsing rasp of crickets all around.

"Well," he said.

"Emerge," suggested Colonel Bishop.

"Of course." Talbert bent out of the car and was escorted up the wide porch steps by the Colonel. Behind, the car pulled away.

Inside the house, chimes bonged hollowly as the Colonel pushed a button. They waited in the darkness and, in a few moments, approaching footsteps sounded.

A tiny aperture opened in the heavy door, disclosing a single bespectacled eye. The eye blinked once and, with a faint accent Talbert could not recognize, whispered furtively, "Why did the widow wear black garters?"

"In remembrance," said Colonel Bishop with great gravity, "of those who had passed beyond."

The door opened.

The owner of the eye was tall, gaunt, of indeterminable age and nationality, his hair a dark mass wisped with gray. His face was all angles and facets, his eyes piercing behind large, horn-rimmed glasses. He wore flannel trousers and a checked jacket.

"This is the Dean," said Colonel Bishop.

"How do you do," said Talbert.

"Come *in*, come *in*," the Dean invited, extending his large hand to Talbert. "Welcome, Mister Bean." He shafted a scolding look at Bishop's pistol. "Now, Colonel," he said, "indulging in melodramatics again? Put it away, dear fellow."

"We can't be too careful," grumped the Colonel.

Talbert stood in the spacious grace of the entry hall looking around. His gaze settled, presently, on the cryptic smile of the Dean, who said:

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"So. You have found us out, sir."

Talbert's toes whipped like pennants in a gale.

"Have I?" he covered his excitement with.

"Yes," said the Dean. "You have. And a masterful display of investigative intuition it was."

Talbert looked around.

"So," he said, voice bated, "It is *here.*"

"Yes," said the Dean, "Would you like to see it?"

"More than anything in the world," said Talbert, fervently.

"Come then," said the Dean.

"Is this wise?" the Colonel warned.

"Come," repeated the Dean.

The three men started down the hallway. For a moment, a shade of premonition darkened Talbert's mind. It was being made so easy. Was it a trap? In a second the thought had slipped away, washed off by a current of excited curiosity.

They started up a winding marble staircase.

"How did you suspect?" the Dean inquired. "That is to say—what prompted you to probe the matter?"

"I just *thought,*" said Talbert meaningfully. "Here are all these jokes yet no one seems to know where they come from. Or *care.*"

"Yes," observed the Dean, "we count upon that lack of interest. What man in ten million ever asks, where did you hear that joke? Absorbed in memorizing the joke for future use, he gives no thought to its source. This, of course, is our protection."

The Dean smiled at Talbert. "But not," he amended, "from men such as you."

Talbert's flush went unnoticed.

They reached the landing and began walking along a wide corridor lit on each side by the illumination of candelabra. There was no more talk. At the end of the corridor they turned right and stopped in front of massive, iron-hinged doors.

"Is this wise?" the Colonel asked again.

"Too late to stop now," said the Dean and Talbert felt a shiver flutter down his spine. What if it *were* a trap? He swallowed, then squared his shoulders. The Dean had said it. It was too late to stop.

The great doors tracked open.

"Et voilà," said the Dean.

The hallway was an avenue. Thick wall-to-wall carpeting sponged beneath Talbert's feet as he walked between the Colonel and the Dean. At periodic intervals along the ceiling hung music-emitting speakers; Talbert recognized the *Gaîté Parisienne.* His gaze moved to a petit point tapestry on which Dionysian acts ensued above the stitched motto, "Happy is the Man Who Is Making Something."

"Incredible," he murmured. "Here; in this house."

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"Exactly," said the Dean.

Talbert shook his head wonderingly.

"To think," he said.

The Dean paused before a glass wall and, braking, Talbert peered into an office. Among its rich appointments strode a young man in a striped silk weskit with brass buttons, gesturing meaningfully with a long cigar while, cross-legged on a leather couch, sat a happily sweatered blonde of rich dimensions.

The man stopped briefly and waved to the Dean, smiled, then returned to his spirited dictating.

"One of our best," the Dean said.

"But," stammered Talbert, "I thought that man was on the staff of—"

"He is," said the Dean. "And, in his spare time, he is also one of us."

Talbert followed on excitement-numbed legs.

"But I had no idea," he said. "I presumed the organization to be composed of men like Bruin and Bullock."

"They are merely our means of promulgation," explained the Dean. "Our word-of-mouthers, you might say. Our *creators* come from more exalted ranks—executives, statesmen, the better professional comics, editors, novelists—"

The Dean broke off as the door to one of the other offices opened and a barrelly, bearded man in hunting clothes emerged. He shouldered past them muttering true things to himself.

"Off again?" the Dean asked pleasantly. The big man grunted. It was a true grunt. He clumped off, lonely for a veldt.

"Unbelievable," said Talbert. "Such men as these?"

"Exactly," said the Dean.

They strolled on past the rows of busy offices, Talbert tourist-eyed, the Dean smiling his mandarin smile, the Colonel working his lips as if anticipating the kiss of a toad.

"But where did it all begin?" a dazed Talbert asked.

"That is history's secret," rejoined the Dean, "veiled behind time's opacity. Our venture does have its honored past, however. Great men have graced its cause—Ben Franklin, Mark Twain, Dickens, Swinburne, Rabelais, Balzac; oh, the honor roll is long. Shakespeare, of course, and his friend Ben Jonson. Still further back, Chaucer, Boccaccio. Further yet, Horace and Seneca, Demosthenes and Plautus. Aristophanes, Apuleius. Yea, in the palaces of Tutankhamen was our work done; in the black temples of Ahriman, the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan. Where did it begin? Who knows? Scraped on rock, in many a primordial cave, are certain drawings. And there are those among us who believe that these were left by the earliest members of the Brotherhood. But this is only legend . . ."

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Now they had reached the end of the hallway and were starting down a cushioned ramp.

"There must be vast sums of money involved in this," said Talbert.

"Heaven forfend," declared the Dean, stopping short. "Do not confuse our work with alley vending. Our workers contribute freely of their time and skill, caring for naught save the Cause."

"Forgive me," Talbert said. Then, rallying, he asked, "What Cause?"

The Dean's gaze fused on inward things. He ambled on slowly, arms behind his back.

"The Cause of Love," he said, "as opposed to Hate. Of Nature, as opposed to the Unnatural. Of Humanity, as opposed to Inhumanity. Of Freedom, as opposed to Constraint. Of Health, as opposed to Disease. Yes, Mr. Bean, disease. The disease called bigotry; the frighteningly communicable disease that taints all it touches; turns warmth to chill and joy to guilt and good to bad. What Cause?" He stopped dramatically. "The Cause of Life, Mr. Bean—as opposed to Death!"

The Dean lifted a challenging finger. "We see ourselves," he said, "as an army of dedicated warriors marching on the strongholds of prudery. Knights Templar with a just and joyous mission."

"Amen to that," a fervent Talbert said.

They entered a large, cubicle-bordered room. Talbert saw men; some typing, some writing, some staring, some on telephones, talking in a multitude of tongues. Their expressions were, as one, intently aloft. At the far end of the room, expression unseen, a man stabbed plugs into a many-eyed switchboard.

"Our Apprentice Room," said the Dean, "wherein we groom our future . . ."

His voice died off as a young man exited one of the cubicles and approached them, paper in hand, a smile tremulous on his lips.

"Oliver," said the Dean, nodding once.

"I've done a joke, sir," said Oliver. "May I—?"

"But of course," said the Dean.

Oliver cleared viscid anxiety from his throat, then told a joke about a little boy and girl watching a doubles match on the nudist colony tennis court. The Dean smiled, nodding. Oliver looked up, pained.

"No?" he said.

"It is not without merit," encouraged the Dean, "but, as it now stands, you see, it smacks rather too reminiscently of the duchess-butler effect, *Wife of Bath* category. Not to mention the justifiably popular double reverse bishop-barmaid gambit."

"Oh, sir," grieved Oliver, "I'll never prevail."

"Nonsense," said the Dean, adding kindly, *"son.* These shorter

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jokes are, by all odds, the most difficult to master. They must be cogent, precise; must say something of pith and moment."

"Yes, sir," murmured Oliver.

"Check with Wojciechowski and Sforzini," said the Dean. "Also Ahmed El-Hakim. They'll brief you on use of the Master Index. Eh?" He patted Oliver's back.

"Yes, sir." Oliver managed a smile and returned to his cubicle. The Dean sighed.

"A somber business," he declared. "He'll never be Class-A. He really shouldn't be in the composing end of it at all but—" He gestured meaningfully, "—there is sentiment involved."

"Oh?" said Talbert.

"Yes," said the Dean. "It was his great grandfather who, on June 23, 1848, wrote the first Traveling Salesman joke, American strain."

The Dean and the Colonel lowered their heads a moment in reverent commemoration. Talbert did the same.

"And so we have it," said the Dean. They were back downstairs, sitting in the great living room, sherry having been served.

"Perhaps you wish to know more," said the Dean.

"Only one thing," said Talbert.

"And that is, sir?"

"Why have you shown it to me?"

"Yes," said the Colonel, fingering at his armpit holster, "why indeed?"

The Dean looked at Talbert carefully as if balancing his reply.

"You haven't guessed?" he said, at last. "No, I can see you haven't. Mr. Bean . . . you are not unknown to us. Who has not heard of your work, your unflagging devotion to sometimes obscure but always worthy causes? What man can help but admire your selflessness, your dedication, your proud defiance of convention and prejudice?" The Dean paused and leaned forward.

"Mr. Bean," he said softly. "Talbert—may I call you that?—*we want you on our team.*"

Talbert gaped. His hands began to tremble. The Colonel, relieved, grunted and sank back into his chair.

No reply came from the flustered Talbert, so the Dean continued: "Think it over. Consider the merits of our work. With all due modesty, I think I may say that here is your opportunity to ally yourself with the greatest cause of your life."

"I'm speechless," said Talbert. "I hardly—that is—how can I . . ."

But, already, the light of consecration was stealing into his eyes.

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Neat, warm, human, pointed—those are the adjectives one expects to apply to a Robert Young story, and they're particularly applicable to this n., w., h. & p. tale of the adaptation of the most modern technique to the most ancient seduction.

Added Inducement

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

THE ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE STORE was one of many that had sprung up in and around the city, seemingly overnight. There were half a dozen TV sets in the window, marked at amazingly low prices, and a window-wide sign boasted: WE'RE PRACTICALLY *GIVING* THEM AWAY! "This is the place we've been looking for," Janice said, and she pulled Henry through the entrance and into the store proper.

They hadn't gone two steps beyond the entrance when they came to a common standstill. Before them stood a huge and dazzling console with a 24" screen, and if you were TV hunting, you couldn't go by it any more than a hungry mouse could go by a new mouse trap baited with his favorite cheese.

"We can never afford that one," Henry said.

"But darling, we can afford to look, can't we?"

So they looked. They looked at the sleek mahogany cabinet and the cute little double doors that you could close when you weren't watching your programs; at the screen and the program in progress; at the company's name at the base of the screen—B A A L—

"Must be a new make," Henry said. "Never heard of it before."

"That doesn't mean it isn't any good," Janice said.

—at the array of chrome-plated dials beneath the company's name and the little round window just below the middle dial—

"What's *that* for?" Janice asked, pointing at the window.

Henry leaned forward. "The dial above it says 'popcorn,' but that *can't* be."

"Oh yes it can!" a voice behind them said.

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Turning, they beheld a small, mild-looking man with a pronounced widow's peak. He had brown eyes, and he was wearing a brown pin-striped suit.

"Do you work here?" Henry asked.

The small man bowed. "I'm Mr. Krull, and this is my establishment. . . . Do you like popcorn, sir?"

Henry nodded. "Once in a while."

"And you, madam?"

"Oh yes," Janice said. "Very much!"

"Allow me to demonstrate."

Mr. Krull stepped forward and tweaked the middle dial halfway around. Instantly, the little window lighted up, revealing a shining inbuilt frying pan with several thimble-sized aluminum cups suspended above it. As Henry and Janice watched, one of the cups upended itself and poured melted butter into the pan; shortly thereafter, another followed suit, emitting a Lilliputian cascade of golden popcorn kernels.

You could have heard a pin drop—or, more appropriately, you could have heard a popcorn kernel pop—the room was so quiet; and after a moment, Henry and Janice and Mr. Krull did hear one pop. Then another one popped, and then another, and pretty soon the machine gun fire of popcorn in metamorphosis filled the room. The window now was like one of those little glass paperweights you pick up and shake and the snow starts falling, only this wasn't snow, it was popcorn—the whitest, liveliest, fluffiest popcorn that Henry and Janice had ever seen.

"Well did you ever!" Janice gasped.

Mr. Krull held up his hand. The moment was a dramatic one. The popcorn had subsided into a white, quivering mound. Mr. Krull tweaked the dial the rest of the way around and the pan flipped over. Abruptly a little secret door beneath the window came open, a tiny red light began blinking on and off, and a buzzer started to buzz; and there, sitting in the newly revealed secret cubicle, was a fat round bowl brim-full with popcorn, and with little painted bluebirds flying happily around its porcelain sides.

Henry was entranced. "Well what'll they think of next!"

"How utterly charming!" Janice said.

"It's good popcorn too," Mr. Krull said.

He bent over and picked up the bowl, and the little red light went out and the buzzer became silent. "Have some?"

Henry and Janice took some, and Mr. Krull took some himself. There was a reflective pause while everybody munched. Presently: "Why it's delicious!" Janice said.

"Out of this world," said Henry.

Mr. Krull smiled. "We grow our

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own. Nothing's too good for Baal Enterprises. . . . And now, if I may, I'd like to demonstrate some of our other special features."

"I don't know," Henry said. "You see—"

"Oh, let him!" Janice interrupted. "It won't hurt us to watch, even if we can't afford such an expensive model."

Mr. Krull needed no more encouragement. He began with a discourse on the cabinet, describing where the wood had been cut, how it had been cured, shaped, worked, polished, and fitted together; then he went into a mass of technical details about the chassis, the inbuilt antenna, the high-fidelity speaker—

Suddenly Henry realized that the paper that had somehow got into his left hand was a contract and that the object that had somehow slipped into his right was a fountain pen. "Wait a minute," he said. "Wait a minute! I can't afford anything like this. We were just look—"

"How do you know you can't afford it?" Mr. Krull asked reasonably. "I haven't even mentioned the price yet."

"Then don't bother mentioning it. It's bound to be too high."

"You might find it too high, and then again, you might not. It's a rather relative figure. But even if you do find it too high, I'm sure the terms will be agreeable."

"All right," Henry said. "What *are* the terms?"

Mr. Krull smiled, rubbed the palms of his hands together. "*One,*" he said, "the set is guaranteed for life. *Two,* you get a lifetime supply of popcorn. *Three,* you pay nothing down. *Four,* you pay no weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual installments—"

"Are you *giving* it to us?" Janice's hazel eyes were incredulous.

"Well, not exactly. You have to pay for it—on one condition."

"Condition?" Henry asked.

"On the condition that you come into a certain amount of money."

"How much money?"

"One million dollars," Mr. Krull said.

Janice swayed slightly. Henry took a deep breath, blew it out slowly. "And the price?"

"Come now, sir. Surely you know what the price is by now. And surely you know who I am by now."

For a while Henry and Janice just stood there. Mr. Krull's widow's peak seemed more pronounced than ever, and there was a hint of mockery in his smile. For the first time, and with something of a shock, Henry realized that his ears were pointed.

Finally he got his tongue loose from the roof of his mouth. "You're not, you can't be—"

"Mr. Baal? Of course not! I'm merely one of his representatives —though in this instance, 'dealer' would be a more appropriate term."

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There was a long pause. Then: "Both—both our souls?" Henry asked.

"Naturally," Mr. Krull said. "The terms are generous enough to warrant both of them, don't you think? . . . Well, what do you say, sir? Is it a deal?"

Henry began backing through the doorway. Janice backed with him, though not with quite the same alacrity.

Mr. Krull shrugged philosophically. "See you later then," he said.

Henry followed Janice into their apartment and closed the door. "I can't believe it," he said. "It *couldn't* have happened!"

"It happened all right," Janice said. "I can still taste the popcorn. You just don't want to believe it, that's all. You're afraid to believe it."

"Maybe you're right. . . ."

Janice fixed supper, and after supper they sat in the living room and watched *Gunfire, Feud, Shoot-Em-Up Henessey,* and the news, on the old beat-up TV set they'd bought two years ago when they were married to tide them over till they could afford a better one. After the news, Janice made popcorn in the kitchen and Henry opened two bottles of beer.

The popcorn was burnt. Janice gagged on the first mouthful, pushed her bowl away. "You know, I almost think it would be worth it," she said. "Imagine, all you have to do is turn a dial and you can have popcorn any time you want without missing a single one of your programs!"

Henry was aghast. "You can't be serious!"

"Maybe not, but I'm getting awful sick of burnt popcorn and picture trouble! And besides, who'd ever give *us* a million dollars anyway!"

"We'll look around again tomorrow afternoon," Henry said. "There must be other makes of sets besides Baal that have inbuilt popcorn poppers. Maybe we'll find one if we look long enough."

But they didn't. They started looking as soon as they got through work in the pants-stretcher factory, but the only sets they found with inbuilt popcorn poppers were stamped unmistakably with the name B A A L, and stood in the new electrical appliance stores that had sprung up, seemingly overnight, along with Mr. Krull's.

"I can't understand it," said the last orthodox dealer they visited. "You're the fiftieth couple to come in here today looking for a TV set with a popcorn window and an inbuilt popcorn popper. Why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"You will," Henry said.

They walked home disconsolately. A truck whizzed by in the street. They read the big red letters on its side—B A A L ENTERPRISES—and they saw the three new TV consoles jouncing on the

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truckbed, and the three little popcorn windows twinkling in the summer sunshine.

They looked at each other, then looked quickly away. . . .

The truck was parked in front of their apartment building when they got home. Two of the sets had already been delivered and the third was being trundled down the nearby alley to the freight elevator. When they reached their floor they saw the set being pushed down the hall, and they lingered in their doorway long enough to learn its destination.

"Betty and Herb!" Janice gasped. "Why, I never thought they'd—"

"Humph!" Henry said. "Shows what their values amount to."

They went in, and Janice fixed supper. While they were eating they heard a noise outside the door, and when they looked out they saw another Baal set being delivered across the hall.

Next morning, three more were delivered on the same floor, and when Janice looked out the window after fixing breakfast, she saw two Baal trucks in the street and half a dozen consoles being trundled into the alley that led to the freight elevator. She beckoned to Henry, and he came over and stood beside her.

She pointed down at the trucks. "I'll bet we're the only people left on the whole block who still pop popcorn in their kitchen. Mr. and Mrs. Neanderthal—that's us!"

"But at least we can still call our souls our own," Henry said, without much conviction.

"I suppose you're right. But it would be so nice to pop popcorn in the living room for a change. And such good popcorn too . . ."

They put in a miserable day at the pants-stretcher factory. On the way home, they passed Mr. Krull's store. There was a long line of people standing in front of it, and a new sign graced the window where the dummy come-on sets still stood: GOING OUT OF BUSINESS—THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST CHANCE TO OWN A TV-POPCORN CONSOLE!

Janice sighed. "We'll be the only ones," she said. "The only ones in the whole city who pop popcorn in the kitchen and watch their favorite programs on a stone-age TV set!"

When Henry didn't answer, she turned toward where she thought he was. But he wasn't there any more. He was standing at the end of the line and waving to her to join him.

Mr. Krull was beaming. He pointed to the two little dotted lines, and Henry and Janice signed their names with eager fingers. Then Henry wrote down their street and number in the space marked ADDRESS, and handed the contract back to Mr. Krull.

Mr. Krull glanced at it, then

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turned towards the back of the store. "Henry and Janice Smith, sir," he called. "111 Ibid Street, Local."

They noticed the tall man then. He was standing at the back of the store, jotting down something in a little red notebook. You could tell just by looking at him that he was a business man, and you didn't have to look twice to see that he was a successful one. He was wearing a neat charcoal-gray suit and a pair of modern horn-rimmed glasses. His hair was quite dark, but his temples were sprinkled becomingly with gray. When he noticed Henry and Janice staring at him, he smiled at them warmly and gave a little laugh. It was an odd kind of a laugh. "Ha ha ha ha," it went, then dropped abruptly way down the scale: "HO HO HO HO! . . ."

"Incidentally," Mr. Krull was saying, "if a million dollars *does* come your way, you have to accept it, you know—even though you won't get a chance to spend it. Not only that, if you get an opportunity to *win* a million dollars, you've got to take advantage of it. It's all stipulated in the contract."

Janice repressed a nervous giggle. "Now who in the world would give *us* a million dollars!"

Mr. Krull smiled, then frowned. "Sometimes I just can't understand people at all," he said. "Why, if I'd approached our prospective customers directly, in my capacity as Mr. Baal's representative, and had offered each of them a brand new TV console—or even a million dollars—for his or her soul, I'd have been laughed right off the face of the earth! If you want to be a success today, no matter what business you're in, you've got to provide an added inducement—Oh, good night, sir."

The tall man was leaving. At Mr. Krull's words, he paused in the doorway and turned. The final rays of the afternoon sun gave his face a reddish cast. He bowed slightly. "Good night, Krull," he said. "Good night, Janice and Henry." He appended to his words another measure of his unusual laughter.

"Who—who was that?" Henry asked.

"That was Mr. Baal. He's preparing a list of contestants for his new TV program."

"His *TV* program!"

Mr. Krull's smile was the quintessence of innocence. "Why yes. It hasn't been announced yet, but it will be soon. . . . It's a giveaway show—and quite a unique one, too. Mr. Baal has everything arranged so that none of the contestants can possibly lose."

Janice was tugging on Henry's arm. Her face was pale. "Come on, darling. Let's go home."

But Henry hung back. "What—what's the name of the show?" he asked.

"Make a Million," Mr. Krull said.

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Recommended Reading

The best science-fantasy books of 1956

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

BOOK PUBLISHING IN GENERAL TOOK a vigorous upward swing in the fall of 1956. Book review editors were inundated with more new titles than their staffs could possibly cover; and in the suspense field, for instance, the voracious one-a-day reader could keep himself supplied with seven new mystery novels a week for the first time in almost a decade.

But this upswing had no effect upon the steady decline of science fiction in book form. A large number of new magazines appeared, and paperback reprints did well; but new science fiction book titles, hardcover and paper, slipped to 48 (in comparison with last year's 59 and the previous year's peak of 74).

This steady falling off is in hardcover books. Oddly, paper originals have remained at a steady 19 titles for three years. This year there were 10 simultaneous publications (in which the paperback is usually the chief factor), and only 19 hardcover books—3 fewer than in the pioneering year of 1949, when New York publishers discovered the existence of s.f.

This is (I keep telling myself) only an understandable pendulum-reaction from the careless and hasty overpublication of the "boom" days. The pendulum is bound to start swinging backwards, and s.f. will eventually find its proper level in American book-publishing.

I would utter this reassuring thought with a little more conviction if the quality of the few s.f. books published were higher. But a general drop in quality is as noticeable as the drop in quantity. This is the shortest best-of-the-year list that this magazine has published in seven years—and quite possibly it should be even shorter. I'll frankly admit that it takes the "best of 1956" description literally: these are, to my taste, the best books of the past year . . . and few of them stand much chance of being listed among the best of the 1950's.

One hopes that this is merely an off-year, such as will occur in any field (though in 15 years of mystery reviewing I can't recall a year with quite such a dearth of distinguished titles), and that s.f. quality will bounce back to its previous heights, as prelude to a rise in quantity.

And at the same time one won-

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ders if there is not too much competent reworking of exhausted material—if perhaps science fiction needs some new kind of shot in the arm. Around 1939, *Astounding* worked its way out of the primitive stage and created modern science fiction. In 1949-1950, this magazine and *Galaxy* expanded the field with a new emphasis on literary and psychological values. Do we have to wait till 1959 for the next invigorating change?

(And probably tomorrow's mail will bring in a manuscript, by a favorite pro or by a complete unknown, so rich in fresh vitality that I shall completely forget these embittered musings of a long-suffering reviewer.)

S. F. NOVELS

Here the absence of first-quality books is particularly marked. The only novels of 1956 to compete with the best of previous years were two expanded rewrites of stories of the 1940's, and one story published nominally for teen-agers. Clarke easily leads the year's s.f. in poetic and emotional impact; del Rey and Heinlein go unrivaled in blending scientific content with vigorous human story.

THE CITY AND THE STARS, by Arthur C. Clarke (Harcourt, Brace, $3.75)

NERVES, by Lester del Rey (Ballantine, $2; paper 35¢)

TIME FOR THE STARS, by Robert A. Heinlein (Scribner's, $2.75)

A half dozen other novels deserve mention for virtues which outweigh their imperfections. Heinlein, weaker on story in his (technically) adult venture, is still unmatchable in future detail, though Herbert comes close in his meticulous study of future submarine warfare. Collins and Schneider bring sharp satiric bite to pictures of future societies developed from trends visible today; and Dickson and Smith tell the year's most lively and intricate melodramas.

TOMORROW'S WORLD, by Hunt Collins (Avalon, $2.50; Pyramid, 35¢, as TOMORROW AND TOMORROW)

MANKIND ON THE RUN, by Gordon R. Dickson (Ace, 35¢)

DOUBLE STAR, by Robert A. Heinlein (Doubleday, $2.95)

THE DRAGON IN THE SEA, by Frank Herbert (Doubleday, $2.95; Avon, 35¢, as 21ST CENTURY SUB)

THE GOLDEN KAZOO, by John G. Schneider (Rinehart, $3.50)

HIGHWAYS IN HIDING, by George O. Smith (Gnome, $3)

SHORT STORIES

Several usually admirable authors produced somewhat weary collections; but Sheckley's stories are bright suave fooling, and the Simak volume appeared late in the year just in time to revive one's faith in science fiction in the great tradition. The Wyndham tales may seem familiar to the long-time aficionado; but their literate charm should win new converts among general readers.

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CITIZEN IN SPACE, by Robert Sheckley (Ballantine, $2; paper, 35¢)
STRANGERS IN THE UNIVERSE, by Clifford Simak (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
TALES OF GOOSEFLESH AND LAUGHTER, by John Wyndham (Ballantine, 35¢)

ANTHOLOGIES

Throughout the "boom" years, this column inveighed against the ridiculous number of anthologies (which rose to 25 in 1954); but I did not expect the number to fall as low as 6. On second thought, that number might be about right . . . if they were all good; but only 2 merit listing here—while I hope that more impersonal "Best" lists elsewhere may include my own THE BEST FROM F&SF: FIFTH SERIES (Doubleday, $3.50). The Merril collection auspiciously launches a new annual series. The Bradbury is particularly notable for the titular short novel by Charles G. Finney, which this department has flatly proclaimed to be "the greatest work of fantasy fiction yet produced by an American."
THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO AND OTHER IMPROBABLE STORIES, edited by Ray Bradbury (Bantam, 35¢)
S-F: THE YEAR'S GREATEST, edited by Judith Merril (Gnome, $3.95; Dell, 35¢)

CRITIQUE

The 14th World Science Fiction Convention formally hailed Damon Knight as s.f.'s ablest critic, which only makes official what I've been saying all along. You'll find plentiful evidence in his collected essays —which may be obtained only direct from the publisher, 3508 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago 13.
IN SEARCH OF WONDER, by Damon Knight (Advent, $4)

FANTASY

Here, if not in s.f., you will find masterpieces absolute, "bests" not merely of 1956 but (to be rash) of all time. The publication of the final volume of Tolkien's trilogy more than confirms one's earlier suspicion that this work is as masterly as it is massive, a sheerly magnificent imaginative creation. At the other end of the scale of fictional lengths, Thurber's brief fables are as wondrously wrought as they are acute and funny (and often not-so-funny). Not too far below such masters, Steen contributes the first genuinely chilling novel of supernatural terror in at least seven years. Mystery writers Coles and Dickson take up, respectively, the humorous and the swash-buckling aspects of interchange between the centuries, both with delightful results.
THE FAR TRAVELLER, by Manning Coles (Doubleday, $3)
FEAR IS THE SAME, by Carter Dickson (Morrow, $3.50)
THE UNQUIET SPIRIT, by Marguerite Steen (Doubleday, $3.75)
THE LORD OF THE RINGS, by J. R. R.

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Tolkien, a trilogy in three volumes: THE TWO TOWERS, THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, THE RETURN OF THE KING (Houghton Mifflin, $5 each)
FURTHER FABLES FOR OUR TIMES, written and illustrated by James Thurber (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

NON-FICTION

Ley continues his agreeable annual custom of writing the year's top book on facts relating to our field, ably aided by Bonestell (and not too much hampered by the dogmatic Dr. von Braun). 1956 was disgraced by the publication of an inordinate number of books of non-factual non-fiction, shallow empty maunderings about hypnotism, reincarnation, spiritualism and flying saucers. The semi-skeptical Ruppelt and the wholly skeptical Kline serve as healthy correctives, while the quite unskeptical Reynolds is interested, not in making converts, but simply in telling good ghost stories with fine pictures. The 2,535-page "small library" by Newman contains a great deal of speculative, humorous and even fictional material—which will come as a surprise only to those who do not know mathematics . . . and mathematicians.

A SCIENTIFIC REPORT ON "THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY," edited by Milton V. Kline (Julian, $3.50)
THE EXPLORATION OF MARS, by Willy Ley and Wernher von Braun, illustrated by Chesley Bonestell (Viking, $4.95)
THE WORLD OF MATHEMATICS, edited by James R. Newman (Simon & Schuster, 4 volumes, $20)
MORE GHOSTS IN IRISH HOUSES, written and illustrated by James Reynolds (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, $12.50)
THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS, by Edward J. Ruppelt (Doubleday, $4.50)

HUMOR

Any F&SF readers so unfortunate as not to be addicted to Pogo are particularly urged to sample the SUNDAY volume below; the rest of you, I trust, already own all three. And I can only wish that books by Capp matched Kelly's in frequency, as they do in satiric quality.
AL CAPP'S BALD IGGLE (Simon & Schuster, $1)
THE POGO SUNDAY BOOK and THE POGO PARTY, by Walt Kelly (Simon & Schuster, $1 each)
SONGS OF THE POGO, by Walt Kelly and Norman Monath (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)

* * *

Let us see, in the space remaining, how many of 1956's other books we can dispose of, to clear the files for the hopeful reception of the new year's product.

John Atkins' TOMORROW REVEALED (Roy, $4) is a curiosum: a history of mankind, 1960-3750, soberly set down by a post-Atomic survivor who has nothing but science fiction books to guide him, and who be-

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lieves them all as factual histories. It's amusing to see the conjectures of Lewis, Wells, Orwell, Wyndham, Graves (the only American writers stressed are Bradbury and van Vogt) treated as historical data, and surprising how often they manage to dovetail and to throw light on each other; but $4 and almost 100,000 words is an awful lot for a thin and protracted jape which seems more suited to some unusually literate and witty fanzine.

A. E. van Vogt's THE PAWNS OF NULL-A (Ace, 35¢) is the 1948 *Astounding* serial, THE PLAYERS OF NULL-A. More than its predecessor, THE WORLD OF NULL-A (superbly disintegrated by Damon Knight in the volume listed above), it illustrates few of van Vogt's virtues and all of his faults, in particular his weakness for self-imitation verging upon self-parody. Malcolm Jameson's TARNISHED UTOPIA (Galaxy, 35¢), a 1942 short novel from *Startling,* is an even more unfortunate resurrection. In THE CURVE OF THE SNOWFLAKE (Norton, $3.75), published in England as FURTHER OUTLOOK, physiologist W. Grey Walter offers a monumentally pretentious and dull first novel of satellite research, love and time travel, lacking enough fresh intellectual stimulus to atone for its amateurishness. Eric van Lhin's POLICE YOUR PLANET (Avalon, $2.50) is a "tough" crime story set on Mars, with a banal Earth-vs.-colonists plot and as much dreary brutality as if the tales of Conan had been rewritten by Mickey Spillane.

By no means the year's worst book, but possibly its greatest disappointment, is T. E. Dikty's THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1956 (Fell, $3.50). 1955's first volume of Dikty-without-Bleiler was weak enough, but this is often flatly unreadable: trite ideas, subliterately written. (The most entertaining and novel subliteracy is the noun *more*—as the singular of *mores!*) So large a book is bound to have some good things in it: I was particularly charmed by Frank Riley's gently graceful story of cybernetics and the law (*If*); and L. Sprague de Camp's *Judgment Day* (*Astounding*), if hardly either science fiction or a story, is a powerful character study. Robert F. Young and Cordwainer Smith are effective, as (I hope you agree) are the F&SF entries by Bloch and Miller. But my direst fears of stagnation cannot persuade me that this volume truly represents the best of Mr. Dikty's 18-month "year" (January, 1955-June, 1956) . . . and fortunately we have the evidence of the Merril collection above to give him the lie.

Scholar-collectors will find Earl Kemp's *Science-Fiction Book Index,* listing all British and American publications for 1955 (and in more useful format than last year), the most valuable portion of the Dikty volume.

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Around the time that this issue appears, science fiction will experience one of its gayest landmark-events: the Broadway opening of Gore Vidal's urbane and delightful comedy, VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET, *starring the incomparable Cyril Ritchard—an event which F&SF celebrates by bringing you the complete original television play which gave birth to the stage version.*

S. f. has been shoddily treated by the dramatic media of stage, screen and TV. On the stage it has, up till this season, been simply ignored—and neglect is, I suppose, a happier fate than being represented by the grotesque parodies which label themselves "science fiction" in films or in TV-except-by-Vidal.

Mr. Vidal is no stranger to our field. In addition to a large number of serious novels, an even larger number of teleplays, and a brief venture into the sexy whodunit (as Edgar Box), this incredible young man (barely over 30!) has written the memorable MESSIAH *(Dutton, 1954), probably science fiction's most effective extrapolation of religious cultism.* VISIT *was, he reports, his most successful television play . . . and by far the hardest to sell. Its tone of witty iconoclasm, of "poking fun at so much that was gloriously sacred"—a tone so taken for granted by all s.f. readers—was poison to the advertising agencies. Obviously even its popularity did not influence the Madison Avenue mind; it has had no successors. Perhaps the prestige of Broadway may bring about some enlightenment . . . and meanwhile you can enjoy at least this one charming satiric adventure, here presented for the first time in any magazine.*

Visit to a Small Planet

by GORE VIDAL

ACT ONE

Stock shot: *The night sky, stars. Then slowly a luminous object arcs into view. As it is almost upon us, dissolve to the living room of the Spelding house in Maryland.*

Superimpose card: THE

© 1956 by Gore Vidal

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TIME: THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW.

The room is comfortably balanced between the expensively decorated and the homely. Roger Spelding is concluding his TV broadcast. He is middle-aged, unctuous, resonant. His wife, bored and vague, knits passively while he talks at his desk. Two technicians are on hand, operating the equipment.

His daughter Ellen, a lively girl of twenty, fidgets as she listens.

SPELDING (*into microphone*). . . . and so, according to General Powers—who should know if anyone does—the flying object which has given rise to so much irresponsible conjecture is nothing more than a meteor passing through the earth's orbit. It is not, as many believe, a secret weapon of this country. Nor is it a spaceship, as certain lunatic elements have suggested. General Powers has assured me that it is highly doubtful there is any form of life on other planets capable of building a spaceship. "If any traveling is to be done in space, we will do it first." And those are his exact words. . . . Which winds up another week of news. (*Crosses to pose with wife and daughter.*) This is Roger Spelding, saying good night to Mother and Father America from my old homestead in Silver Glen, Maryland, close to the warm pulse beat of the nation.

TECHNICIAN. Good show tonight, Mr. Spelding.

SPELDING. Thank you.

TECHNICIAN. Yes, sir, you were right on time.

(*Technicians switch off microphone. Spelding rises wearily, his mechanical smile and heartiness suddenly gone.*)

MRS. SPELDING. Very nice, dear. Very nice.

TECHNICIAN. See you next week, Mr. Spelding.

SPELDING. Thank you, boys.

(*Technicians go.*)

SPELDING. Did you like the broadcast, Ellen?

ELLEN. Of course I did, Daddy.

SPELDING. Then what did I say?

ELLEN. Oh, that's not fair.

SPELDING. It's not very flattering when one's own daughter won't listen to what one says while millions of people . . .

ELLEN. I always listen, Daddy, you know that.

MRS. SPELDING. We love your broadcasts, dear. I don't know what we'd do without them.

SPELDING. Starve, I suspect.

ELLEN. I wonder what's keeping John?

SPELDING. Certainly not work.

ELLEN. Oh, Daddy, stop it! John works hard and you know it.

MRS. SPELDING. Yes, he's a perfectly nice boy, Roger. I like him.

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SPELDING. I know, I know. He has every virtue except the most important one: he has no get-up-and-go.

ELLEN (*precisely*). He doesn't want to get up and he doesn't want to go because he's already where he wants to be, on his own farm, which is exactly where *I'm* going to be when we're married.

SPELDING. More thankless than a serpent's tooth is an ungrateful child.

ELLEN. I don't think that's right. Isn't it "more deadly . . ."?

SPELDING. Whatever the exact quotation is, I stand by the sentiment.

MRS. SPELDING. Please, don't quarrel. It always gives me a headache.

SPELDING. I never quarrel. I merely reason, in my simple way, with Miss Know-it-all here.

ELLEN. Oh, Daddy! Next you'll tell me I should marry for money.

SPELDING. There is nothing wrong with marrying a wealthy man. The horror of it has always eluded me. However, my only wish is that you marry someone hard-working, ambitious, a man who'll make his mark in the world. Not a boy who plans to sit on a farm all his life, growing peanuts.

ELLEN. English walnuts.

SPELDING. Will you stop correcting me?

ELLEN. But, Daddy, John grows walnuts . . .

(*John enters, breathlessly.*)

JOHN. Come out! It's coming this way! It's going to land right here!

SPELDING. *What's* going to land?

JOHN. The spaceship. Look!

SPELDING. Apparently you didn't hear my broadcast. The flying object in question is a meteor, not a spaceship.

(*John has gone out with Ellen. Spelding and Mrs. Spelding follow.*)

MRS. SPELDING. Oh, my! Look! Something *is* falling! Roger, you don't think it's going to hit the house, do you?

SPELDING. The odds against being hit by a falling object that size are, I should say, roughly, ten million to one.

JOHN. Ten million to one or not, it's going to land right here and it's *not* falling.

SPELDING. I'm sure it's a meteor.

MRS. SPELDING. Shouldn't we go down to the cellar?

SPELDING. If it's not a meteor, it's an optical illusion . . . mass hysteria.

ELLEN. Daddy, it's a real spaceship. I'm sure it is.

SPELDING. Or maybe a weather balloon. Yes, that's what it is. General Powers said only yesterday . . .

JOHN. It's landing!

SPELDING. I'm going to call the police . . . the army! (*Bolts inside.*)

ELLEN. Here it comes . . . oh, look how it shines!

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JOHN. How soft it lands!

MRS. SPELDING. Right in my rose garden!

ELLEN. Maybe it's a balloon.

JOHN. No, it's a spaceship and right there in your own back yard.

ELLEN. What makes it shine so?

JOHN. I don't know, but I'm going to find out. (*Runs off toward the light.*)

ELLEN. Oh, darling, don't! Darling, please. John, John come back! (*Spelding, wide-eyed, returns.*)

MRS. SPELDING. Roger, it's landed right in my rose garden.

SPELDING. I got General Powers. He's coming over. He said they've been watching this thing. They . . . they don't know what it is.

ELLEN. You mean it's nothing of ours?

SPELDING. They believe it . . . (*Swallows hard.*) . . . it's from outer space.

ELLEN. And John's down there! Daddy, get a gun or something.

SPELDING. Perhaps we'd better leave the house until the Army gets here.

ELLEN. We can't leave John.

SPELDING. I can. (*Peers nearsightedly.*) Why, it's not much larger than a car. I'm sure it's some kind of meteor.

ELLEN. Meteors are blazing hot.

SPELDING. This is a cold one.

ELLEN. It's opening . . . the whole side's opening! (*Shouts.*) John! Come back! Quick!

MRS. SPELDING. Why, there's a man getting out of it! (*Sighs.*) I feel much better already. I'm sure if we ask him, he'll move that thing for us. Roger, you ask him.

SPELDING (*ominously*). If it's really a man?

ELLEN. John's shaking hands with him. (*Calls.*) John darling, come on up here . . .

MRS. SPELDING. And bring your friend.

SPELDING. There's something wrong with the way that creature looks . . . if it is a man and not a . . . not a monster.

MRS. SPELDING. He looks perfectly nice to me.

(*John and the visitor appear. The visitor is in his forties, a mild, pleasant-looking man with side whiskers and dressed in the fashion of 1860. He pauses when he sees the three people in silence for a moment. They stare back at him, equally interested.*)

VISITOR. I seem to've made a mistake. I *am* sorry. I'd better go back and start over again.

SPELDING. My dear sir, you've only just arrived. Come in, come in. I don't need to tell you what a pleasure this is . . . Mister . . . Mister . . .

VISITOR. Kreton. . . . This *is* the wrong costume, isn't it?

SPELDING. Wrong for what?

KRETON. For the country, and the time.

SPELDING. Well, it's a trifle old-fashioned.

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MRS. SPELDING. But really awfully handsome.

KRETON. Thank you.

MRS. SPELDING (*to husband*). Ask him about moving that thing off my rose bed.

(*Spelding leads them all into living room.*)

SPELDING. Come in and sit down. You must be tired after your trip.

KRETON. Yes, I am a little. (*Looks around delightedly.*) Oh, it's better than I'd hoped!

SPELDING. Better? What's better?

KRETON. The house . . . that's what you call it? Or is this an apartment?

SPELDING. This is a house in the state of Maryland, U.S.A.

KRETON. In the late twentieth century! To think this is really the twentieth century. I must sit down a moment and collect myself. The *real* thing! (*He sits down.*)

ELLEN. You . . . you're an American, are you?

KRETON. What a nice thought! No, I'm not.

JOHN. You sound more English.

KRETON. Do I? Is my accent very bad?

JOHN. No, it's quite good.

SPELDING. Where *are* you from, Mr. Kreton?

KRETON (*evasively*). Another place.

SPELDING. On this earth of course.

KRETON. No, not on this planet.

ELLEN. Are you from Mars?

KRETON. Oh dear no, not Mars. There's nobody on Mars . . . at least no one I know.

ELLEN. I'm sure you're teasing us and this is all some kind of publicity stunt.

KRETON. No, I really am from another place.

SPELDING. I don't suppose you'd consent to my interviewing you on television?

KRETON. I don't think your authorities will like that. They are terribly upset as it is.

SPELDING. How do you know?

KRETON. Well, I . . . pick up things. For instance, I know that in a few minutes a number of people from your Army will be here to question me and they—like you—are torn by doubt.

SPELDING. How extraordinary!

ELLEN. Why did you come here?

KRETON. Simply a visit to your planet. I've been studying it for years. In fact, one might say you people are my hobby. Especially this period of your development.

JOHN. Are you the first person from your . . . your planet to travel in space like this?

KRETON. Oh my no! Everyone travels who wants to. It's just that no one wants to visit you. I can't think why. *I* always have. You'd be surprised what a thorough study I've made. (*Recites.*) The planet Earth is divided into five continents with a number of large islands. It is mostly water. There is one moon. Civilization is only just beginning. . . .

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SPELDING. Just beginning! My dear sir, we have had . . .

KRETON (*blandly*). You are only in the initial stages—the most fascinating stages, as far as I'm concerned. . . . I do hope I don't sound patronizing.

ELLEN. Well, we are very proud.

KRETON. I know and that's one of your most endearing, primitive traits. Oh, I can't believe I'm here at last!

(*General Powers, a vigorous product of the National Guard, and his aide enter.*)

POWERS. All right, folks. The place is surrounded by troops. Where is the monster?

KRETON. I, my dear General, am the monster.

POWERS. What are you dressed up for, a fancy-dress party!

KRETON. I'd hoped to be in the costume of the period. As you see, I am about a hundred years too late.

POWERS. Roger, who is this joker?

SPELDING. This is Mr. Kreton . . . General Powers. Mr. Kreton arrived in that thing outside. He is from another planet.

POWERS. I don't believe it.

ELLEN. It's true. We saw him get out of the flying saucer.

POWERS (*to aide*). Captain, go down and look at that ship. But be careful. Don't touch anything. And don't let anybody else near it. (*Aide goes.*) So you're from another planet.

KRETON. Yes. My, that's a very smart uniform, but I prefer the ones made of metal, the ones you used to wear. You know: with the feathers on top.

POWERS. That was five hundred years ago.

KRETON. As long ago as that!

POWERS. Are you *sure* you're not from the Earth?

KRETON. Yes.

POWERS. Well, I'm not. You've got some pretty tall explaining to do.

KRETON. I am at your service.

POWERS. All right, which planet?

KRETON. None that you have ever heard of.

POWERS. Where is it?

KRETON. You wouldn't know.

POWERS. This solar system?

KRETON. No.

POWERS. Another system?

KRETON. Yes.

POWERS. Look, I don't want to play twenty questions with you. I just want to know where you're from. The law requires it.

KRETON. It's possible that I *could* explain it to a mathematician, but I'm afraid I couldn't explain it to you, not for another five hundred years, and by then, of course, *you'd* be dead, because you people do die, don't you?

POWERS. What?

KRETON. Poor fragile butterflies, such brief little moments in the sun. . . . You see, *we* don't die.

POWERS. You'll die all right if you're a spy or a hostile alien.

KRETON. I'm sure you wouldn't be so cruel.

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(*Aide returns; he looks disturbed.*)

POWERS. What did you find?

AIDE. I'm not sure, General.

POWERS (*heavily*). Then do your best to describe what the object is like.

AIDE. Well, it's elliptical, with a fourteen-foot diameter. And it's made of an unknown metal which shines, and inside there isn't anything.

POWERS. Isn't anything?

AIDE. There's nothing inside the ship: no instruments, no food, nothing.

POWERS (*to Kreton*). What did you do with your instrument board?

KRETON. With my what? Oh, I don't have one.

POWERS. How does the thing travel?

KRETON. I don't know.

POWERS. You don't know? Now, look, mister, you're in pretty serious trouble. I suggest you do a bit of cooperating. You claim you traveled here from outer space in a machine with no instruments . . .

KRETON. Well, these cars are rather common in my world and I suppose, once upon a time, I must've known the theory on which they operate, but I've long since forgotten. After all, General, we're not mechanics, you and I.

POWERS. Roger, do you mind if we use your study?

SPELDING. Not at all. Not at all, General.

POWERS. Mr. Kreton and I are going to have a chat. (*To aide.*) Put in a call to the Chief of Staff.

AIDE. Yes, General.

(*Spelding rises, leads Kreton and Powers into next room, a handsomely furnished study, many books, globes of the world, and so forth.*)

SPELDING. This way, gentlemen.

(*Kreton sits down comfortably beside the globe, which he twirls thoughtfully. At the door, Spelding speaks in a low voice to Powers.*)

SPELDING. I hope I'll be the one to get the story first, Tom.

POWERS. There isn't any story. Complete censorship. And by the way, this house is under martial law. I've a hunch we're in trouble.

(*He shuts the door. Spelding turns and rejoins his family.*)

ELLEN. I think he's wonderful, whoever he is.

MRS. SPELDING. I wonder how much damage he did to my rose garden. . . .

JOHN. It's sure hard to believe he's really from outer space. No instruments, no nothing . . . boy, they must be advanced scientifically.

MRS. SPELDING. Is he spending the night, dear?

SPELDING. What?

MRS. SPELDING. Is he spending the night?

SPELDING. Oh, yes, yes, I suppose he will be.

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MRS. SPELDING. Then I'd better go make up the bedroom. He seems perfectly nice to me. I like his whiskers. They're so very . . . comforting. Like Grandfather Spelding's. (*She goes.*)

SPELDING (*bitterly*). I *know* this story will leak out before I can interview him. I just know it.

ELLEN. What does it mean, we're under martial law?

SPELDING. It means we have to do what General Powers tells us to do. (*Goes to window. Soldier passes by.*) See?

JOHN. I wish I'd taken a closer look at that ship when I had the chance.

ELLEN. Perhaps he'll give us a ride in it.

JOHN. Traveling in space! Just like those stories. You know: intergalactic-drive stuff.

SPELDING. *If* he's not an imposter.

ELLEN. I have a feeling he isn't.

JOHN. Well, I better call the family and tell them I'm all right. (*He crosses to telephone by the door which leads into hall.*)

AIDE. I'm sorry, sir, but you can't use the phone.

SPELDING. He certainly can. This is my house . . .

AIDE (*mechanically*). This house is a military reservation until the crisis is over—order of General Powers. I'm sorry.

JOHN. Just how am I to call home to say where I am?

AIDE. Only General Powers can help you. You're also forbidden to leave this house without permission.

SPELDING. You can't do this!

AIDE. I'm afraid, sir, we've done it.

ELLEN. Isn't it exciting!

Cut to study.

POWERS. Are you deliberately trying to confuse me?

KRETON. Not deliberately, no.

POWERS. We have gone over and over this for two hours now and all that you've told me is that you're from another planet in another solar system . . .

KRETON. In another dimension. I think that's the word you use.

POWERS. In another dimension, and you have come here as a tourist.

KRETON. Up to a point, yes. What did you expect?

POWERS. It is my job to guard the security of this country.

KRETON. I'm sure that must be very interesting work.

POWERS. For all I know, you are a spy, sent here by an alien race to study us, preparatory to invasion.

KRETON. Oh, none of my people would *dream* of invading you.

POWERS. How do I know that?

KRETON (*blandly*). You don't, so I suggest you believe me. I should also warn you: I can tell what's inside.

POWERS. What's inside?

KRETON. What's inside your mind.

POWERS. You're a mind reader?

KRETON. I don't really read it. I hear it.

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POWERS. What am I thinking?

KRETON. That I am either a lunatic from the Earth or a spy from another world.

POWERS. Correct. But then you could've guessed that. (*Frowns.*) What am I thinking now?

KRETON. You're making a picture. Three silver stars. You're pinning them on your shoulder, instead of the two stars you now wear.

POWERS (*startled*). That's right. I was thinking of my promotion.

KRETON. If there's anything I can do to hurry it along, just let me know.

POWERS. You can. Tell me why you're here.

KRETON. Well, we don't travel much, my people. We used to, but since we see everything through special monitors and re-creators, there is no particular need to travel. However, I am a hobbyist. I love to gad about.

POWERS (*taking notes*). Are you the first to visit us?

KRETON. Oh no! We started visiting you long before there were people on the planet. However, we are seldom noticed on our trips. I'm sorry to say I slipped up, coming in the way I did . . . but then this visit was all rather impromptu. (*Laughs.*) I am a creature of impulse, I fear. (*Aide looks in.*)

AIDE. Chief of Staff on the telephone, General.

POWERS (*picks up phone*). Hello, yes, sir. Powers speaking. I'm talking to him now. No, sir. No, sir. No, we can't determine what method of power was used. He won't talk. Yes, sir. I'll hold him here. I've put the house under martial law . . . belongs to a friend of mine, Roger Spelding, the TV commentator. Roger Spelding, the TV . . . What? Oh, no, I'm sure he won't say anything. Who . . . oh, yes, sir. Yes, I realize the importance of it. Yes, I will. Goodby. (*Hangs up.*) The President of the United States wants to know all about you.

KRETON. How nice of him! And I want to know all about him. But I do wish you'd let me rest a bit first. Your language is still not familiar to me. I had to learn them all. Quite exhausting.

POWERS. You speak *all* our languages?

KRETON. Yes, all of them. But then it's easier than you might think since I can see what's inside.

POWERS. Speaking of what's inside, we're going to take your ship apart.

KRETON. Oh, I wish you wouldn't.

POWERS. Security demands it.

KRETON. In that case *my* security demands you leave it alone.

POWERS. You plan to stop us?

KRETON. I already have. (*Beat.*) Listen.

(*Far-off shouting. Aide rushes into the study.*)

AIDE. Something's happened to the

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ship, General. The door's shut and there's some kind of wall all around it, an invisible wall. We can't get near it.

KRETON (*to camera*). I hope there was no one inside.

POWERS (*to Kreton*). How did you do that?

KRETON. I couldn't begin to explain. Now, if you don't mind, I think we should go in and see our hosts.

(*He rises, goes into living room. Powers and aide look at each other.*)

POWERS. Don't let him out of your sight.

Cut to living room as Powers picks up phone. Kreton is with John and Ellen.

KRETON. I don't mind curiosity but I really can't permit them to wreck my poor ship.

ELLEN. What do you plan to do, now you're here?

KRETON. Oh, keep busy. I have a project or two. . . . (*Sighs.*) I can't believe you're real!

JOHN. Then we're all in the same boat.

KRETON. Boat? Oh yes! Well, I should've come ages ago but I . . . I couldn't get away until yesterday.

JOHN. Yesterday? It only took you a *day* to get here?

KRETON. One of *my* days, not yours. But then you don't know about time yet.

JOHN. Oh, you mean relativity.

KRETON. No, it's much more involved than that. You won't know about time until . . . now let me see if I remember . . . no, I don't, but it's about two thousand years.

JOHN. What do we do between now and then?

KRETON. You simply go on the way you are, living your exciting primitive lives . . . you have no idea how much fun you're having now.

ELLEN. I hope you'll stay with us while you're here.

KRETON. That's very nice of you. Perhaps I will. Though I'm sure you'll get tired of having a visitor under foot all the time.

ELLEN. Certainly not. And Daddy will be deliriously happy. He can interview you by the hour.

JOHN. What's it like in outer space?

KRETON. Dull.

ELLEN. I should think it would be divine!

(*Powers enters.*)

KRETON. No, General, it won't work.

POWERS. What won't work?

KRETON. Trying to blow up my little force field. You'll just plow up Mrs. Spelding's garden.

(*Powers snarls.*)

ELLEN. Can you tell what we're *all* thinking?

KRETON. Yes. As a matter of fact, it makes me a bit giddy. Your minds are not at all like ours. You see, we control our

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thoughts, while you . . . well, it's extraordinary the things you think about!

ELLEN. Oh, how awful! You can tell *everything* we think?

KRETON. Everything. It's one of the reasons I'm here, to intoxicate myself with your primitive minds . . . with the wonderful rawness of your emotions! You have no idea how it excites me! You simply seethe with unlikely emotions.

ELLEN. I've never felt so sordid.

JOHN. From now on I'm going to think about agriculture.

SPELDING (*entering*). You would.

ELLEN. Daddy!

KRETON. No, no. You must go right on thinking about Ellen. Such wonderfully *purple* thoughts!

SPELDING. Now see here, Powers, you're carrying this martial law thing too far.

POWERS. Unfortunately, until I have received word from Washington as to the final deposition of this problem, you must obey my orders: no telephone calls, no communication with the outside.

SPELDING. This is insupportable.

KRETON. Poor Mr. Spelding! If you like, I shall go. That would solve everything, wouldn't it?

POWERS. You're not going anywhere, Mr. Kreton, until I've had my instructions.

KRETON. I sincerely doubt if you could stop me. However, I put it up to Mr. Spelding. Shall I go?

SPELDING. Yes! (*Powers gestures a warning.*) Do stay, I mean, want you to get a good impression of us . . .

KRETON. And of course you will want to be the first journalist to interview me. Fair enough. All right, I'll stay on for a while.

POWERS. Thank you.

KRETON. Don't mention it.

SPELDING. General, may I ask our guest a few questions?

POWERS. Go right ahead, Roger. I hope you'll do better than I did.

SPELDING. Since you can read our minds, you probably already know what our fears are.

KRETON. I do, yes.

SPELDING. We are afraid that you represent a hostile race.

KRETON. And I have assured General Powers that my people are not remotely hostile. Except for me, no one is interested in this planet's present stage.

SPELDING. Does this mean you might be interested in a *later* stage?

KRETON. I'm not permitted to discuss your future. Of course my friends think me perverse to be interested in a primitive society, but there's no accounting for tastes, is there? You are my hobby. I love you. And that's all there is to it.

POWERS. So you're just here to look around . . . sort of going native.

KRETON. What a nice expression! That's it exactly. I am going native.

POWERS (*grimly*). Well, it is my

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view. that you have been sent here by another civilization for the express purpose of reconnoitering prior to invasion.

KRETON. That *would* be your view! The wonderfully primitive assumption that all strangers are hostile. You're almost too good to be true, General.

POWERS. You deny your people intend to make trouble for us?

KRETON. I deny it.

POWERS. Then are they interested in establishing communication with us? Trade? That kind of thing?

KRETON. We have always had communication with you. As for trade, well, we do not trade . . . that is something peculiar only to your social level. (*Quickly.*) Which I'm not criticizing! As you know, I approve of everything you do.

POWERS. I give up.

SPELDING. You have no interest then in . . . well, trying to dominate the earth?

KRETON. Oh, yes! Didn't I tell you?

POWERS. I thought you just finished saying your people weren't interested in us.

KRETON. *They're* not, but *I* am.

POWERS. You!

KRETON. I, yes. You see, I've come here to take charge.

POWERS. Of the United States?

KRETON. No, of the whole world. I'm sure you'll be much happier and it will be great fun for me. You'll get used to it in no time.

POWERS. This is ridiculous. How can one man take over the world?

KRETON (*gaily*). Wait and see!

POWERS (*to aide*). Grab him!

(*Powers and aide rush Kreton, but within a foot of him they stop, stunned.*)

KRETON. Naughty! Naughty! See? You can't touch me. That's part of the game, too. (*Yawns and stretches.*) Now, if you don't mind, I shall go up to my room for a little lie-down.

SPELDING. I'll show you the way.

KRETON. That's all right. I know the way. (*Touches his brow.*) Such savage thoughts! My head is vibrating like a drum. I feel quite giddy, with all of you thinking at once. (*Starts to door, pauses beside Mrs. Spelding.*) No, it's not a dream, dear lady. I shall be here in the morning when you wake up. And now, good night, dear, wicked children.

He goes as we fade out.

Act Two

Fade in on Kreton's bedroom next morning. He lies fully clothed on bed with cat on his lap.

KRETON. Poor cat! Of course I sympathize with you. Dogs *are* distasteful. What? Oh, I can well

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believe they do: yes, yes, how disgusting. They don't ever groom their fur! But you do *constantly,* such a fine coat. No, no, I'm not just saying that, I really mean it: exquisite texture. Of course, I wouldn't say it was *nicer* than skin, but even so . . . What? Oh, no! They *chase* you! Dogs chase you for no reason at all except pure malice? You poor creature. Ah, but you *do* fight back! That's right! Give it to them: slash, bite, scratch! Don't let them get away with a trick. . . . No! Do dogs really do that? Well, I'm sure *you* don't. What . . . oh, well, yes, I completely agree about mice. They *are* delicious! (Ugh!) Pounce, snap and there is a heavenly dinner. No, I don't know any mice yet . . . they're not very amusing? But after all, think how you must terrify them because you are so bold, so cunning, so beautifully predatory! (*Knock at door.*) Come in.

ELLEN (*enters*). Good morning. I brought you your breakfast.

KRETON. How thoughtful! (*Examines bacon.*) Delicious, but I'm afraid my stomach is not like yours, if you'll pardon me. I don't eat. (*Removes pill from pocket and swallows it.*) This is all I need for the day. (*Indicates cat.*) Unlike this creature, who would eat her own weight every hour, given a chance.

ELLEN. How do you know?

KRETON. We've had a talk.

ELLEN. You can *speak* to the cat?

KRETON. Not speak exactly, but we communicate. I look inside and the cat cooperates. Bright red thoughts, very exciting, though rather on one level.

ELLEN. Does Kitty like us?

KRETON. No, I wouldn't say she did. But then she has very few thoughts not connected with food. Have you, my quadruped criminal? (*He strokes the cat, which jumps to the floor.*)

ELLEN. You know you've really upset everyone.

KRETON. I supposed that I would.

ELLEN. Can you really take over the world, just like that?

KRETON. Oh, yes.

ELLEN. What do you plan to do when you *have* taken over?

KRETON. Ah, that is my secret.

ELLEN. Well, I think you'll be a very nice President, *if* they let you, of course.

KRETON. What a sweet girl you are! Marry him right away.

ELLEN. Marry John?

KRETON. Yes. I see it in your head *and* in his. He wants you very much.

ELLEN. Well, we plan to get married this summer, if Father doesn't fuss too much.

KRETON. Do it before then. I shall arrange it all if you like.

ELLEN. How?

KRETON. I can convince your father.

ELLEN. That sounds so ominous! I

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think you'd better leave poor Daddy alone.

KRETON. Whatever you say. (*Sighs.*) Oh, I love it here. When I woke up this morning I had to pinch myself to prove I was really here.

ELLEN. We were all doing a bit of pinching too. Ever since dawn we've had nothing but visitors and phone calls and troops outside in the garden. No one has the faintest idea what to do about you.

KRETON. Well, I don't think they'll be confused much longer.

ELLEN. How do you plan to conquer the world?

KRETON. I confess I'm not sure. I suppose I must make some demonstration of strength, some colorful trick that will frighten everyone . . . though I much prefer taking charge quietly. That's why I've sent for the President.

ELLEN. The President? *Our* President?

KRETON. Yes, he'll be along any minute now.

ELLEN. But the President just doesn't go around visiting people.

KRETON. He'll visit me. (*Chuckles:*) It may come as a surprise to him, but he'll be in this house in a very few minutes. I think we'd better go downstairs now. (*To cat.*) No, I will not give you a mouse. You must get your own. Be self-reliant. Beast!

Dissolve to study. Powers is reading book entitled The Atom and You. *Muffled explosions offstage.*

AIDE (*entering*). Sir, nothing seems to be working. Do we have the general's permission to try a fission bomb on the force field?

POWERS. No . . . no. We'd better give it up.

AIDE. The men are beginning to talk.

POWERS (*thundering*). Well, keep them quiet! I'm sorry, Captain. I'm on edge. Fortunately, the whole business will soon be in the hands of the World Council.

AIDE. What will the World Council do?

POWERS. It will be interesting to observe them.

AIDE. You don't think this Kreton can really take over the world, do you?

POWERS. Of course not. Nobody can.

Dissolve to living room. Mrs. Spelding and Spelding.

MRS. SPELDING. You still haven't asked Mr. Kreton about moving that thing, have you?

SPELDING. There are too many important things to ask him.

MRS. SPELDING. I hate to be a nag, but you know the trouble I have had getting anything to grow in that part of the garden . . .

JOHN (*enters*). Good morning.

MRS. SPELDING. Good morning, John.

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JOHN. Any sign of your guest?

MRS. SPELDING. Ellen took his breakfast up to him just now.

JOHN. They don't seem to be having much luck, do they? I sure hope you don't mind my staying here like this.

(*Spelding glowers.*).

MRS. SPELDING. Why, we love having you! I just hope your family aren't too anxious.

JOHN. One of the G.I.'s finally called them, said I was staying here for the week end.

SPELDING. The rest of our *lives,* if something isn't done soon.

JOHN. Just how long do you think that'll be, Dad?

SPELDING. Who knows?

(*Kreton and Ellen enter.*)

KRETON. Ah, how wonderful to see you again! Let me catch my breath. . . . Oh, your minds! It's not easy for me, you know: so many crude thoughts blazing away! Yes, Mrs. Spelding, I will move the ship off your roses.

MRS. SPELDING. That's awfully sweet of you.

KRETON. Mr. Spelding, if any interviews are to be granted, you will be the first, I promise you.

SPELDING. That's very considerate, I'm sure.

KRETON. So you can stop thinking *those* particular thoughts. And now where is the President?

SPELDING. The President?

KRETON. Yes, I sent for him. He should be here. (*Goes to terrace window.*) Ah, that must be he.

(*A swarthy man in uniform with a sash across his chest is standing, bewildered, on the terrace. Kreton opens the glass doors.*)

KRETON. Come in, sir, come in, Your Excellency. Good of you to come on such short notice.

(*Man enters.*)

MAN (*in Spanish accent*). Where am I?

KRETON. You *are* the President, aren't you?

MAN. Of course I am the President. What am I doing here? I was dedicating a bridge and I find myself . . .

KRETON (*aware of his mistake*). Oh, dear! *Where* was the bridge?

MAN. Where do you think, you idiot, in Paraguay!

KRETON (*to others*). I seem to've made a mistake. Wrong President. (*Gestures and man disappears.*) Seemed rather upset, didn't he?

JOHN. You can make people come and go just like that?

KRETON. Just like that.

(*Powers looks into room from the study.*)

POWERS. Good morning, Mr. Kreton. Could I see you for a moment?

KRETON. By all means. (*He crosses to the study.*)

SPELDING. I believe I am going to be mad.

Cut to study. The aide

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stands at attention while Powers addresses Kreton.

POWERS. . . . and so we feel, the government of the United States feels, that this problem is too big for any one country. Therefore, we have turned the whole affair over to Paul Laurent, the Secretary-General of the World Council.

KRETON. Very sensible. I should've thought of that myself.

POWERS. Mr. Laurent is on his way here now. And may I add, Mr. Kreton, you've made me look singularly ridiculous.

KRETON. I'm awfully sorry. (*Pause.*) No, you can't kill me.

POWERS. You were reading my mind again.

KRETON. I can't really help it, you know. And such *black* thoughts today, but intense, very intense.

POWERS. I regard you as a menace.

KRETON. I know you do and I think it's awfully unkind. I do mean well.

POWERS. Then go back where you came from and leave us alone.

KRETON. No, I'm afraid I can't do that just yet . . .

(*Phone rings; aide answers it.*)

AIDE. He's outside? Sure, let him through. (*To Powers.*) The Secretary-General of the World Council is here, sir.

POWERS (*to Kreton*). I hope you listen to *him*.

KRETON. Oh, I shall, of course. I love listening.

(*Door opens. Paul Laurent, middle-aged and serene, enters. Powers and aide stand at attention. Kreton goes forward to shake hands.*)

LAURENT. Mr. Kreton?

KRETON. At your service, Mr. Laurent.

LAURENT. I welcome you to this planet in the name of the World Council.

KRETON. Thank you, sir, thank you.

LAURENT. Could you leave us alone for a moment, General?

POWERS. Yes, sir.

(*Powers and aide go. Laurent smiles at Kreton.*)

LAURENT. Shall we sit down?

KRETON. Yes, yes, I love sitting down. I'm afraid my manners are not quite suitable yet.

(*They sit down.*)

LAURENT. I'm sure they are more than suitable. But now, Mr. Kreton, in violation of all the rules of diplomacy, may I come to the point?

KRETON. You may.

LAURENT. Why are you here?

KRETON. Curiosity. Pleasure.

LAURENT. You are a tourist, then, in this time and place?

KRETON (*nods*). Yes. Very well put.

LAURENT. We have been informed that you have extraordinary powers.

KRETON. By your standards, yes, they must seem extraordinary.

LAURENT. We have also been informed that it is your intention

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to . . . to take charge of this world.

KRETON. That is correct. . . . What a remarkable mind you have! I have difficulty looking inside it.

LAURENT (*laughs*). Practice. I've attended so many conferences. . . . May I say that your conquest of our world puts your status of tourist in a rather curious light?

KRETON. Oh, I said nothing about *conquest*.

LAURENT. Then how else do you intend to govern? The people won't allow you to direct their lives without a struggle.

KRETON. But I'm sure they will if I ask them to.

LAURENT. You believe you can do all this without, well, without violence?

KRETON. Of course I can. One or two demonstrations and I'm sure they'll do as I ask. (*Smiles.*) Watch this.

(*Pause. Then shouting. Powers bursts into room.*)

POWERS. *Now* what've you done?

KRETON. Look out the window, Your Excellency.

(*Laurent goes to window. A rifle floats by, followed by an alarmed soldier.*)

KRETON. Nice, isn't it? I confess I worked out a number of rather melodramatic tricks last night. Incidentally, all the rifles of all the soldiers in all the world are now floating in the air. (*Gestures.*) Now they have them back.

POWERS (*to Laurent*). You see, sir, I didn't exaggerate in my report.

LAURENT (*awed*). No, no, you certainly didn't.

KRETON. You were skeptical weren't you?

LAURENT. Naturally. But now I . . . now I think it's possible.

POWERS. That this . . . this gentleman is going to run everything?

LAURENT. Yes, yes I do. And it might be wonderful.

KRETON. You *are* more clever than the others. You begin to see that I mean only good.

LAURENT. Yes, only good. General, do you realize what this means? We can have one government . . .

KRETON. With innumerable bureaus, and intrigue . . .

LAURENT (*excited*). And the world could be incredibly prosperous, especially if he'd help us with his superior knowledge. . . .

KRETON (*delighted*). I will, I will. I'll teach you to look into one another's minds. You'll find it devastating but enlightening: all that self-interest, those *lurid* emotions . . .

LAURENT. No more countries. No more wars . . .

KRETON (*startled*). What? Oh, but I like a lot of countries. Besides, at this stage of your development you're supposed to have lots of countries and lots of wars . . . innumerable wars. . . .

LAURENT. But you can help us change all that.

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KRETON. *Change* all that! My dear sir, I am your friend.

LAURENT. What do you mean?

KRETON. Why, your deepest pleasure is violence. How can you deny that? It is the whole point to you, the whole point to my hobby . . . and you are my hobby, all mine.

LAURENT. But our lives are devoted to *controlling* violence and not creating it.

KRETON. Now, don't take me for an utter fool. After all, I can see into your minds. I can feel your emotions as though they were my own and your emotions are incredibly violent. My dear fellow, don't you *know* what you are?

LAURENT. No, what are we?

KRETON. You are savages. I have returned to the dark ages of an insignificant planet simply because I want the glorious excitement of being among you and reveling in your savagery! There is murder in all your hearts and I love it! It intoxicates me!

LAURENT (*slowly*). You hardly flatter us.

KRETON. I didn't mean to be rude, but you did ask me why I am here and I've told you.

LAURENT. You have no wish, then, to . . . to help us poor savages.

KRETON. I couldn't even if I wanted to. You won't be civilized for at least two thousand years and you won't reach the level of my people for about a million years.

LAURENT (*sadly*). Then you have come here only to . . . to observe?

KRETON. No, more than that. I mean to regulate your pasttimes. But don't worry: I won't upset things too much. I've decided I don't want to be known to the people. You will go right on with your countries, your squabbles, the way you always have, while I will *secretly* regulate things through you.

LAURENT. The World Council does not govern. We only advise.

KRETON. Well, I shall advise you and you will advise the governments and we shall have a lovely time.

LAURENT. I don't know what to say. You obviously have the power to do as you please.

KRETON. I'm glad you realize that. Poor General Powers is now wondering if a hydrogen bomb might destroy me. It won't, General.

POWERS. Too bad.

KRETON. Now, Your Excellency, I shall stay in this house until you have laid the groundwork for my first project.

LAURENT. And what is that to be?

KRETON. A war! I want one of your really splendid wars, with all the trimmings, all the noise and the fire . . .

LAURENT. A war! You're joking. Why, at this moment we are working as hard as we know how *not* to have a war.

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KRETON. But secretly you want one. After all, it's the one thing your little race does well. You'd hardly want me to deprive you of your simple pleasures, now would you?

LAURENT. I think you must be mad.

KRETON. Not mad, simply a philanthropist. Of course I myself shall get a great deal of pleasure out of a war (the vibrations must be incredible) but I'm doing it mostly for you. So, if you don't mind, I want you to arrange a few incidents, so we can get one started spontaneously.

LAURENT. I refuse.

KRETON. In that event, I shall select someone else to head the World Council. Someone who *will* start a war. I suppose there exist a few people here who might like the idea.

LAURENT. How can you do such a horrible thing to us? Can't you see that we don't want to be savages?

KRETON. But you have no choice. Anyway, you're just pulling my leg! I'm sure you want a war as much as the rest of them do and that's what you're going to get: the biggest war you've ever had!

LAURENT (*stunned*). Heaven help us!

KRETON (*exuberant, not listening*). Heaven won't. Oh, what fun it will be! I can hardly wait!

He strikes the globe a happy blow as we fade out.

ACT THREE

Fade in on study, two weeks later. Kreton is sitting at desk on which a map is spread out. He has a pair of dividers, some models of jet aircraft. Occasionally he pretends to dive-bomb, imitating the sound of a bomb going off. Powers enters.

POWERS. You wanted me, sir?

KRETON. Yes, I wanted those figures on radioactive fall-out.

POWERS. They're being made up now, sir. Anything else?

KRETON. Oh, my dear fellow, why do you dislike me so?

POWERS. I am your military aide, sir. I don't have to answer that question. It is outside the sphere of my duties.

KRETON. Aren't you at least happy about your promotion?

POWERS. Under the circumstances, no, sir.

KRETON. I find your attitude baffling.

POWERS. Is that all, sir?

KRETON. You have never once said what you thought of my war plans. Not once have I got a single word of encouragement from you, a single compliment . . . only black thoughts.

POWERS. Since you read my mind, sir, you know what I think.

KRETON. True, but I can't help but feel that deep down inside of you there is just a twinge of

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professional jealousy. You don't like the idea of an outsider playing your game better than you do. Now confess!

POWERS. I am acting as your aide only under duress.

KRETON (*sadly*). Bitter, bitter . . . and to think I chose you especially as my aide. Think of all the other generals who would give anything to have your job.

POWERS. Fortunately, they know nothing about my job.

KRETON. Yes, I do think it wise not to advertise my presence, don't you?

POWERS. I can't see that it makes much difference, since you seem bent on destroying our world.

KRETON. I'm not going to destroy it. A few dozen cities, that's all, and not very nice cities either. Think of the fun you'll have building new ones when it's over.

POWERS. How many millions of people do you plan to kill?

KRETON. Well, quite a few, but they love this sort of thing. You can't convince me they don't. Oh, I know what Laurent says. But he's a misfit, out of step with his time. Fortunately, my new World Council is more reasonable.

POWERS. Paralyzed is the word, sir.

KRETON. You don't think they like me either?

POWERS. You *know* they hate you, sir.

KRETON. But love and hate are so confused in your savage minds and the vibrations of the one are so very like those of the other that I can't always distinguish. You see, we neither love nor hate in my world. We simply have hobbies. (*He strokes the globe of the world tenderly.*) But now to work. Tonight's the big night: first, the sneak attack; then, boom! (*Claps hands gleefully.*)

Dissolve to living room, to John and Ellen.

ELLEN. I've never felt so helpless in my life.

JOHN. Here we all stand around doing nothing while he plans to blow up the world.

ELLEN. Suppose we went to the newspapers . . .

JOHN. He controls the press. When Laurent resigned they didn't even print his speech.

(*A gloomy pause.*)

ELLEN. What are you thinking about?

JOHN. Walnuts.

(*They embrace.*)

ELLEN. Can't we do anything?

JOHN. No, I guess there's nothing.

ELLEN (*vehemently*). Oh! I could kill him!

(*Kreton and Powers enter.*)

KRETON. Oh, very good, Ellen, very good! I've never felt you so violent.

ELLEN. You heard what I said to John?

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KRETON. Not in words, but you were absolutely bathed in malevolence.

POWERS. I'll get the papers you wanted, sir. (*Exits.*)

KRETON. I don't think he likes me very much, but your father does. Only this morning he offered to handle my public relations and I said I'd let him. Wasn't that nice of him?

JOHN. I think I'll go get some fresh air. (*Goes out through terrace door.*)

KRETON. Oh, dear! (*Sighs.*) He doesn't like me either. Only your father is really entering the spirit of the game. He's a much better sport than you, my dear.

ELLEN (*exploding*). Sport! That's it! You think we're sport. You think we're animals to be played with. Well, we're not. We're people and we don't want to be destroyed.

KRETON (*patiently*). But *I* am not destroying you. You will be destroying one another of your own free will, as you have always done. I am simply a . . . a kibitzer.

ELLEN. No, you are a vampire!

KRETON. A vampire? You mean I drink blood? Ugh!

ELLEN. No, you drink emotions, our emotions. You'll sacrifice us all for the sake of your . . . your vibrations!

KRETON. *Touché.* Yet what harm am I really doing? It's true I'll enjoy the war more than anybody; but it will be *your* destructiveness, after all, not mine.

ELLEN. You could stop it.

KRETON. So could you.

ELLEN. I?

KRETON. Your race. They could stop altogether, but they won't. And I can hardly intervene in their natural development. The most I can do is help out.

ELLEN. We are not what you think. We're not so . . . so primitive.

KRETON. My dear girl, just take this one household: your mother dislikes your father but she is too tired to do anything about it so she knits and she gardens and she tries not to think about him. Your father, on the other hand, is bored with all of you. Don't look shocked; he doesn't like you any more than you like him. . . .

ELLEN. Don't say that!

KRETON. I am only telling you the truth. Your father wants you to marry someone important; therefore, he objects to John, while you, my girl . . .

(*With a fierce cry, Ellen grabs vase to throw.*)

ELLEN. You devil!

(*Vase breaks in her hand.*)

KRETON. You see? That proves my point perfectly. (*Gently.*) Poor savage, I cannot help what you are. (*Briskly.*) Anyway, you will soon be distracted from your personal problems. Tonight is the night. If you're a good girl, I'll let you watch the bombing.

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Dissolve to study. Eleven forty-five. Powers and the aide gloomily await the war.

AIDE. General, isn't there anything we can do?

POWERS. It's out of our hands.

(*Kreton, dressed as a hussar, with shako, enters.*)

KRETON. Everything on schedule?

POWERS. Yes, sir. Planes left for their targets at twenty-two hundred.

KRETON. Good . . . good. I myself shall take off shortly after midnight to observe the attack first-hand.

POWERS. Yes, sir.

(*Kreton goes into the living room, where the family is gloomily assembled.*)

KRETON (*enters from study*). And now, the magic hour approaches! I hope you're all as thrilled as I am.

SPELDING. You still won't tell us who's attacking whom?

KRETON. You'll know in exactly . . . fourteen minutes.

ELLEN (*bitterly*). Are we going to be killed too?

KRETON. Certainly not! You're quite safe, at least in the early stages of the war.

ELLEN. Thank you.

MRS. SPELDING. I suppose this will mean rationing again.

SPELDING. Will . . . will we see anything from here?

KRETON. No, but there should be a good picture on the monitor in the study. Powers is tuning in.

JOHN (*at window*). Hey look, up there! Coming this way!

(*Ellen joins him.*)

ELLEN. What is it?

JOHN. Why . . . it's *another* one! And it's going to land.

KRETON (*surprised*). I'm sure you're mistaken. No one would dream of coming here. (*He has gone to the window too.*)

ELLEN. It's landing!

SPELDING. Is it a friend of yours, Mr. Kreton?

KRETON (*slowly*). No, no, not a friend . . .

(*Kreton retreats to the study; he inadvertently drops a lace handkerchief beside the sofa.*)

JOHN. Here he comes.

ELLEN (*suddenly bitter*). Now we have two of them.

MRS. SPELDING. My poor roses.

(*The new visitor enters in a gleam of light from his ship. He is wearing a most futuristic costume. Without a word, he walks past the awed family into the study. Kreton is cowering behind the globe. Powers and the aide stare, bewildered, as the visitor gestures sternly and Kreton reluctantly removes shako and sword. They communicate by odd sounds.*)

Cut to living room as Powers and the aide enter from the study.

POWERS (*to Ellen*). Who is that?

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ELLEN. It's another one, another visitor.

POWERS. Now we're done for.

ELLEN. I'm going in there.

MRS. SPELDING. Ellen, don't you dare!

ELLEN. I'm going to talk to them.

JOHN. I'll go in with you.

ELLEN (*grimly*). No, alone. I know what I want to say.

Cut to interior of the study, to Kreton and the other visitor as Ellen enters.

ELLEN. I want you both to listen to me . . .

VISITOR. You don't need to speak. I know what you will say.

ELLEN. That you have no right here? That you mustn't . . .

VISITOR. I agree. Kreton has no right here. He is well aware that it is forbidden to interfere with the past.

ELLEN. The past?

VISITOR (*nods*). You are the past, the dark ages; we are from the the future. In fact, we are *your* descendants on another planet. We visit you from time to time, but we never interfere because it would change *us* if we did. Fortunately, I have arrived in time.

ELLEN. There won't be a war?

VISITOR. There will be no war. And there will be no memory of any of this. When we leave here you will forget Kreton and me. Time will seem to turn back to the moment before his arrival.

ELLEN (*to Kreton*). Why did you want to hurt us?

KRETON (*heartbroken*). Oh, but I didn't! I only wanted to have . . . well, to have a little fun, to indulge my hobby . . . against the rules, of course.

VISITOR (*to Ellen*). Kreton is a rarity among us. Mentally and morally he is retarded. He is a child and he regards your period as his toy.

KRETON. A child, now really!

VISITOR. He escaped from his nursery and came back in time. . . .

KRETON. And *every*thing went wrong, everything! I wanted to visit 1860—that's my *real* period —but then something happened to the car and I ended up here; not that I don't find you nearly as interesting, but . . .

VISITOR. We must go, Kreton.

KRETON (*to Ellen*). You did like me just a bit, didn't you?

ELLEN. Yes, yes I did, until you let your hobby get out of hand. (*To visitor.*) What is the future like?

VISITOR. Very serene, very different . . .

KRETON. Don't believe him: it is dull, dull, dull beyond belief! One simply floats through eternity: no wars, no excitement . . .

VISITOR. It is forbidden to discuss these matters.

KRETON. I can't see what difference it makes since she's going to forget all about us anyway.

ELLEN. Oh, how I'd love to see the future . . .

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VISITOR. It is against . . .

KRETON. Against the rules. How tiresome you are. (*To Ellen.*) But, alas, you can never pay us a call because you aren't born yet! I mean, where we are you are not. Oh, Ellen dear, think kindly of me, until you forget.

ELLEN. I will.

VISITOR. Come. Time has begun to turn back. Time is bending.

(*He starts to door. Kreton turns conspiratorially to Ellen.*)

KRETON. Don't be sad, my girl. I shall be back one bright day, but a bright day in 1860. I dote on the Civil War, so exciting . . .

VISITOR. Kreton!

KRETON. Only next time I think it'll be more fun if the *South* wins! (*He hurries after the visitor.*)

Cut to clock as the hands spin backwards. Dissolve to the living room, exactly the same as the first scene: Spelding, Mrs. Spelding, Ellen.

SPELDING. There is nothing wrong with marrying a wealthy man. The horror of it has always eluded me. However, my only wish is that you marry someone hard-working, ambitious, a man who'll make his mark in the world. Not a boy who is content to sit on a farm all his life, growing peanuts . . .

ELLEN. English walnuts! And he just won't sit there.

SPELDING. Will you stop contradicting me?

ELLEN. But, Daddy, John grows walnuts . . .

(*John enters.*)

JOHN. Hello, everybody.

MRS. SPELDING. Good evening, John.

ELLEN. What kept you, darling? You missed Daddy's broadcast.

JOHN. I saw it before I left home. Wonderful broadcast, sir.

SPELDING. Thank you, John.

JOHN. That meteor you were talking about, well, for a while it looked almost like a spaceship or something. You can just barely see it now.

(*Ellen joins him at window. They watch, arms about one another.*)

SPELDING. Spaceship! Nonsense! Remarkable what some people will believe, want to believe. Besides, as I said in the broadcast, if there's any traveling to be done in space we'll do it first, and we haven't done it yet. . . .

He notices Kreton's handkerchief on sofa and picks it up. They all look at it, puzzled, as we cut to stock shot of the starry night, against which two spaceships vanish in the distance, one serene in its course, the other erratic, as we fade out.

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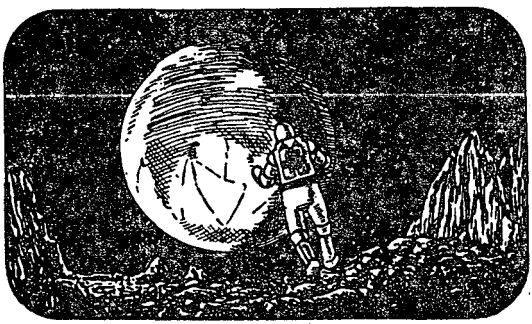
VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET *was performed on May 8, 1955, on the Goodyear Television Playhouse (NBC). The producer was Gordon Duff, the associate producer Robert Alan Aurther, the director Jack Smigh. The cast:*

KRETON	Cyril Ritchard
ROGER SPELDING	Edward Andrews
ELLEN SPELDING	Jill Kraft
MRS. SPELDING	Sylvia Davis
JOHN RANDOLPH	Dick York
GENERAL POWERS	Alan Reed
AIDE	Bruce Kirby
PAUL LAURENT	Theodore Bikel
SECOND VISITOR	Louis Edmonds
PRESIDENT OF PARAGUAY	Alfred De la Fuente



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Last

"Time traveling is finished," the blotchily transparent man whispered, no longer struggling against the embrace of the even more ghostly machine.

"Why?" Last questioned gently.

"Because there's nowhere to go."

"The Black Wall?" Last said.

The trapped man nodded so that the fine sand of the valley's floor wavered through him. "Not one day's distance in the past," he answered faintly, "And not one hour's in the future. Time is being squeezed to nothingness. . . ." His gnat voice failed and sand showed through him.

Last, now fully meriting his name, stood up knowing that the long-expected moment had come. His face was the end of all faces—evolution's simplest, most expressive, and most enigmatic. In the soot-black sky a half dozen stars glowed redly, fewer than when he had knelt. Underfoot the dark sand lay like a soft cloak, covering not a rocky planetary core but what had once been the most strongly built of all artificial planets.

Last felt very tired and completely used. He knew that every atom in his body, like every atom in the narrowing cosmos, had been marked and manipulated by the consciousness and striving one of whose names is man.

The valley around him was crowded with time machines, silvery and irregularly dim, stretching shattered across more moments than the present, wrecked against the Black Wall they had gone to explore, which was closing in from the beginning and the end.

Last had also visited the valley of the space machines, pillared with the ships whose final, almost instantaneous transists across the twists and turns of the folded dimensions had found no life surviving anywhere else in the cosmos and at the ends of it only the inward-rushing Black Wall. He had peered into the valley of the metal brains, whose sparkling minds had traveled the infinities of possibility and found no more answers. He had wandered slowly through the elvish valley of the espers, the perfectly telepathic beings whose thoughts had journeyed throughout the great inner universe of consciousness and will, discovering nothing but deep-worn tracks. Now all the valleys were silent.

Last, feeling everything around him concentrating to a womb, said clearly, "Black Wall, I will not wail at you. I have struggled against you, I have accepted your challenge, I have helped to make the universe a single great white word standing out against your nothingness, Oh Wall."

And his face broke into a tender, bold, whimsical smile as the red stars went out like coals and time contracted to a single moment and thought closed in on itself and it was the end.

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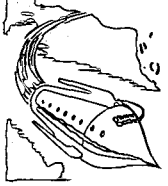

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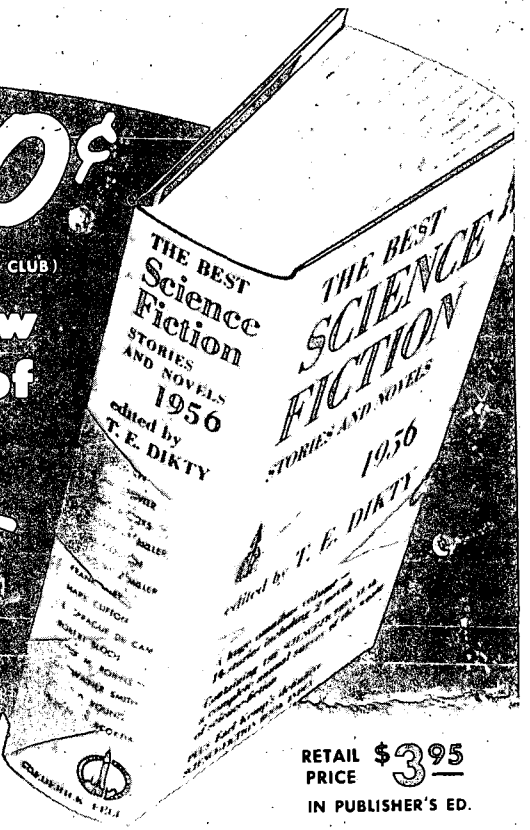

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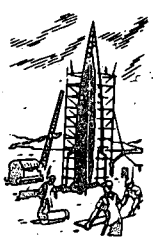

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